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Evaluating Community Participation within the USFS's Stewardship  
Contracting Pilot Program – A Comparative Study

By  
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B.A. University of Notre Dame, 1996

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

The University of Montana

2002

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Evaluating Community Participation Within the USFS's Stewardship Contracting Pilot Program – A Comparative Study

Chairperson: Jim Burchfield



Using a model for effective public participation within community based ecosystem management, I examined three USFS stewardship projects to determine if communities were engaged in a process of meaningful participation. In each of the cases I interviewed five community participants and a representative from the USFS to determine if the goals of community stakeholders was being implemented into the project work being done on the ground.

In each of the three cases, stewardship contracting and the process of public participation surrounding the implementation of the projects, have given local people a greater say in the management decisions regarding the pilot program. While each of the criteria for meaningful participation within the framework of CBEM that was developed for this study were not met, there was enough evidence within each case to recognize that the communities within this study had the ability to influence agency decisions within the stewardship contracting program.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction and Methodology**

Within the past decade, the USFS's timber sale program has changed its focus from a primary supplier of wood fiber to meet consumer needs to using timber harvests as a tool to accomplish a multitude of objectives of which many are used to help restore public forests. ([www.fs.fed.us/land/changingharvestobjectives](http://www.fs.fed.us/land/changingharvestobjectives)). A report produced in 2001 by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation (PI) states, "recent shifts in the timber program's focus to attend to ecosystem management or watershed needs have resulted in the use of timber harvests as a cost-effective tool to achieve a variety of expanded land management objectives" (Report to Congress, PI, pg. 4). While the USFS is still in the business of cutting trees, the "get the cut out" mantra no longer pervades the agency, which is evident in the reduction of the annual timber harvest on public lands (11 billion board feet (bbf) in 1990 to 4bbf in 2000; [www.fs.fed.us/](http://www.fs.fed.us/)). While this may be a result of a diminished supply of merchantable timber due to generations of intensive logging, coupled with effective environmental regulations and advocacy, the fact remains that the amount of timber harvested from public lands is lower than has been in fifty years (While the current administration is attempting to increase the amount of commercial harvest on public lands, it is difficult to imagine a timber program reaching the level of production that it once was in the 1980s).

Accompanying this shift in timber production is the growing concern that our national forests are in poor ecological health (Domback, 1998). Historic fire suppression, insect infestation, overgrazing, and previous commercial timber harvests have created undesirable forest health conditions – the threat of

catastrophic wildfires, diminishing water quality, and the invasion of noxious weeds are forest health issues that the USFS must address (Barker, 1997). In a recent conference in Missoula, Montana on National Forest Policy, representatives from the USFS, the timber industry, the environmental community, and rural Montanans, agreed that there is a great deal of restorative work to be done within national forest lands (Wheeler Conference on National Forest Policy, Forest Health Panel, October 2001).

Timber harvests, often referred to as vegetation treatments, are now used by the agency to reduce fuel loads, enhance wildlife habitat, mimic historic forest types, all in an attempt to improve the health of public forests. The USFS reports that there is an increasing need for this type of work to be done within the national forest system:

The agency estimates that 24 million acres of national forest land are at high risk of loss for resource value due to disease and insect infestation. They also estimate that 24 million acres of national forest land within the interior west at risk of loss to catastrophic wildfire. On many of these acres, high stand densities, principally by small-sized trees that are presently of limited commercial value, are a major contributor for heightened risk. Often, these stands require thinning before other management tools, such as prescribed burning, can be applied (Bartuska, 2000).

While the restoration science (the “experimental research that attempts to restore ecosystems” - Smith pg. 13. 1996) that the USFS uses to justify this rationale for cutting trees has been debated, the current approach to timber policy is unarguably different than that of even a decade ago. The rhetoric the agency now uses acknowledges that board feet production is not a priority within the timber

sales program and restoring the forest into a naturally functioning ecosystem has surfaced as a priority within the USFS. This indeed represents a policy shift.

Forest policy issues are of large concern to communities that reside adjacent to national forest lands, both for socioeconomic as well as ecological concerns. Depressed economies, the threat of wildfire, and water quality issues have motivated these local communities to take an active role in expressing opinions of forest management to the USFS. Significant numbers of watershed groups and collaborative partnerships have emerged throughout the West to address natural resource conflicts, which are of great importance to the livelihoods and lifestyles of rural people. The community-based ecosystem management (CBEM) movement addresses the fact that successful forest and ecosystem management must address the broad needs of local, forest-dependent communities (Kusel, 2001). In 1997, then USFS chief Mike Domback, developed a Collaborative Stewardship Team whose goal was to “develop a strategic plan which would increase the Forest Service’s capacity and desire to collaborate with all forest users and interests, and thus improve the stewardship of forest and grassland resources” (Estill et. al., pg 1). The findings reported by the Collaborative Stewardship Team have started to influence USFS management plans and policies. This effort begins to recognize the importance of place-based, community groups and concerned citizens in the management of public forests, which is the focus of this study.

This combination of factors: the changing timber sale policy and objectives, the need to restore forest ecosystems, and the demand for greater local



participation in resource management decisions led to the creation of the stewardship contracting pilot program in the summer of 1997. Implementation of the program was contingent upon Congressional approval and in fiscal year 1999, community activists, the wood products industry, and agency personnel, successfully influenced Congress which then granted the USFS authorization to implement 28 stewardship contracting pilot projects.(see map in appendix 1 for Region 1 projects). Since that time, an additional 24 projects have been given authorization under the legislation. Of the 52 total projects, 17 are located in Region 1 (Montana and Northern Idaho).

This paper attempts to evaluate three communities in the Rocky Mountain West and their ability to engage in a meaningful public participation process with the USFS surrounding the implementation of the stewardship contracting pilot program. Meaningful public participation is defined as the inclusion of ideas and suggestions of community stakeholders inons of community stakeholders in from the inception of a project to its implementation (Walker and Daniels, 2001). In 1997, a survey of participation practitioners was conducted and the respondents identified core values of meaningful participation:

- People should have a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- The process communicates the interests and meets the needs of all participants (Delli Priscolli, 1997).

The goal of this research is to determine if community stakeholders have been engaged by the USFS in a meaningful public participation process surrounding stewardship contracting.

The projects I have focused my research on are found within Region 1 of the USFS management system. Case Study 1 is located within the Priest Lake Basin, on the Priest Lake Ranger District within the Idaho panhandle National Forest. The second Case Study is located in the Yaak Valley on the Three Rivers Ranger District within the Kootenai National Forest in Northwest Montana. The third Case Study is located in the Hungry Horse Ranger District in the Flathead National Forest, just west of the Glacier/Bob Marshall wilderness complex. In all three cases, local community stakeholders have emerged in various capacities to engage the USFS in a dialogue regarding stewardship projects.

Through a series of qualitative interviews of the key participants in each of these projects, I will attempt to evaluate how well each group was able to participate with the USFS as the agency administered the pilot program. I have interviewed five participants regarding each project and have recorded these conversations (USFS personnel were also interviewed for each case study and their comments are used minimally to enhance the overall picture of participation within each case). Using direct comments from each of these interview sessions, I will attempt to capture the story of how each group of people has been able to work with the USFS to engage in a process of meaningful public participation. Based on a body of academic literature dealing specifically with public participation within community based ecosystem management (CBEM), I have

developed a simplified set of topics and criteria that I will use to measure and evaluate the level of participation in each case. Each topic is essentially an ingredient for meaningful participation within the framework of CBEM. The topics then have a set of two criteria to determine if the ingredients are actually present in the case studies. The framework for evaluation looks like this:

Group Diversity (Moote, 1997), (Moote et. al., 2000), (Cestero, 1999), (Ack 2000).	Representation	Fair and Open Procedures
Communication (Snow, 2000), (Burns, 2000), (Moote and Cortner, 1999), (Duane, 1997).	Shared Learning	Civic Dialogue
Power (Wondolleck and Yafee, 2000, Luzadis et. al., 2000).	Influence	Impact on the Ground



Chapter 2 of the paper focuses on the history and politics surrounding the stewardship legislation and why the pilot program was created. Included in this section are excerpts of interviews conducted with three people who were influential in the creation of the stewardship legislation; Carol Daly (Flathead Economic Policy Center), Steve Thompson (National Park Foundation) and Mary Mitsos (National Forest Foundation). Chapter 3 looks specifically at the stewardship contracting legislation and how it adheres to several important

tenants of CBEM. This chapter describes the emergence of CBEM as a resource management tool and highlights the role of public participation within the framework of CBEM. Within this chapter I will discuss the topics and criteria that will be used to evaluate each case study. Based on the established criteria, each of chapters 4, 5, and 6 will evaluate one of the specific stewardship projects identified above. Chapter 7 will draw conclusions on stewardship contracting and the ability of local communities to participate in the pilot program based on a synthesis of the findings from each case study Chapter 8 will offer reflections on critical components of the stewardship pilot program and provide insight as to the long term viability of these projects. This chapter touches briefly on topics for further research regarding the stewardship pilot program and closes out this study.

## **Chapter 2 - The Origins of Stewardship Contracting**

The need for a new contractual mechanism for stewardship purposes became apparent to USFS personnel in the late 1990s (USFS 2000). However it was the work of community collaborators in Northwest Montana's Flathead Valley that originally brought the concept of stewardship contracting to the attention of the USFS. The Flathead Forestry Project (FFP) is a volunteer group of citizens living in the Flathead Valley whose organizational mission seeks to promote community trust and collaborative processes, to ensure ecosystem health, and to provide for a sustainable resource based-economy within the region (Schwennesen, 2001). The group has been meeting since early 1994 and its members have been identifying forestlands, both public and private, in which stewardship activities could enhance the health of the forest and provide jobs for local community people. The composition of FFP is of an assortment of knowledgeable people, whose understanding of forestry, economic development, environmental policy, and the ecology of the Flathead Valley, commands respect within the region.

Part of the impetus that formed the community group was to address issues of concern that were relevant to public land management. Since Flathead County is composed of 77% federally owned land, the FFP felt it was imperative to be able to accomplish meaningful projects on public forestland (Daly, 2000). The thought of many members of the FFP was that the Flathead National Forest demonstrated an inability to handle on-the-ground problems (Schwennesen, 2000).

For residents of the Flathead Valley this became obvious and is evident in the harvest data over the last decade and a half. In fiscal year 1987 the Flathead National Forest offered 114.7 million board feet of timber for sale. In fiscal year 1999 that number fell to 6 million (Daly, 2000). For decades timber production had become the lifeblood of the local economy in the Flathead Valley. But as the forests were stripped of their commercial value and environmental regulations began to halt the sale of federal timber, the local economy collapsed.

The steady decline of timber output has frustrated many residents of the Flathead Valley who were now unemployed having been so dependent on the sale of federal timber. But what the local logging community learned from decades of mis-management was that much of the forest was in a degraded state. Subsequently, local residents have identified situations, such as disease infestation and major fuels accumulations, in which timber harvest seems to be the logical and most appropriate tool for improving forest health conditions. FFP members concluded that small-scale timber harvests could be used to help restore forest ecosystems and return a generation of unemployed timber workers back into the woods (Schwenesen, 2001).

It was under the pretense of using small timber sales to put local people back to work that members of the FFP began to draft a piece of legislation, to be passed through Congress, that would address the contractual mechanisms needed for stewardship forestry projects on public lands. FFP member Carol Daly crafted the text of the legislation, with input from members Steve Thompson and Keith Olson (Daly, personal conversation, 2002). The legislation was designed to

address several of the concerns FFP members were having with the methods and procedural mechanisms the USFS was using to achieve various management goals. In an effort to produce the most desirable outcome on the land, in terms of forest health, the draft legislation attempted to use the service contract framework as the basis for a series of pilot projects. The logger would be hired by the National Forest to achieve management objectives, rather than the logger working for the mill. A logging contractor would be hired based on his or her reputation for quality work and their understanding of the forest system in which the vegetation treatment was to occur. Any timber that was generated as a result of achieving the desired outcome would be sold under an entirely separate contract, on a delivered log basis. The timber industry would serve as the purchaser of the wood, rather than the catalyst behind harvesting the national forest. Maximizing board feet production would be eliminated from the work. This type of vegetation treatment was called stewardship contracting under the draft legislation.

In 1995 the stewardship legislation was introduced in Congress by two Montana Democrats and was easily defeated before it reached the senate floor (Thompson, personal conversation 2002). However, the concept of stewardship contracting was not dead on the vine. Thompson recalls that following the defeat of the original 1995 legislation there was a groundswell of support for the stewardship concept from community groups around the nation. The key component within the community forestry movement was to separate the “log from the logger”. It was the delivered log concept that could in fact “fix the

broken system” and begin the process of restoration on public lands (Thompson, personal conversation 2002).

During this same time, in somewhat of a response to this growing national pressure, the Forest Service hierarchy was beginning to embrace the concept of collaborative stewardship, the idea that bringing people to together, in meaningful, constructive dialogue, would help to solve management issues on the ground. In January of 1997 wildlife biologist Mike Domback was hired as the new chief of the USFS. In a message to all agency employees Domback said:

Our task is to help bring people together on the land. That’s what collaborative stewardship is all about. Whether we are engineers, support staff, or line officers, we are educators and communicators, the teachers and technical experts who can bring communities of interest together to help define the policies and practices needed for healthy sustainable forests. In doing so we must streamline our regulations and simplify the way we implement the laws toward the goal of a government that works better and costs less (Domback, 1997).

Domback’s tenure as chief of the USFS began to steer the mission of the agency in a new direction. Forest restoration, accomplished through community collaboration and the guidance of the agency’s technical staff, became the focus of forest policy change under the second term of the Clinton administration. Stewardship contracting seemed an appropriate tool to bring local people into the picture and to help restore public forests.

At the regional level, USFS employees were also crafting ways in which the bureaucratic agency could “streamline regulations and simplify the way the agency implements law”. However, it was not the idea of collaborative stewardship that was the catalyst for an experimental program. In Region 1, USFS economist Fred Stewart was determined to test new contractual



mechanisms in which the agency could implement projects faster after a record of decision, the final step in the procedural regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), was reached regarding a prospective management action (Stewardship Meeting, 10/01). USFS personnel felt that it could achieve new management objectives, in a more efficient manner, if the agency could experiment with various methods of contracting.

In the early 1990s the agency began its own experimental initiative called “improving vegetation management projects” (Daly, personal conversation, 2002). The goal was to test different ways in which the contracting process could be accomplished in a timely manner, while achieving the desired outcome on the ground. Unfortunately for the agency these projects were not able to generate the necessary revenue to cover costs and appropriated funding unavailable to pay for the experiment (Bartuska, 2000). The agency quickly learned that the key to achieving this new system of doing business was an exchange of goods (timber) as a means to pay for the service activities that the agency wanted to accomplish. The authorization to conduct such experiments needed to come from the Congressional level. Stewart began to talk with others within the Region and started to generate agency support for an opportunity to experiment with contracting mechanisms (Daly, 2002). It was time to convince Congress that this idea had merit. The USFS’s idea was to take parts of the original piece of stewardship legislation and combine that language with the concepts the agency desired to explore.

This time around it was Conrad Burns's office that gave support for stewardship contracting. Burns was able to attach the legislation to an omnibus appropriations bill, which passed without contention. The story behind the turn around is interesting. The original stewardship contracting legislation drafted up in the Flathead called for the delivered log concept, thereby shutting the industry out of the forests. In setting up the contract under FFP's legislation, appropriated dollars were needed to kick start the work on the ground, with the idea being that the timber by-product would eventually pay for the cost of the work. However, in the second stewardship legislation, one of the contractual experiments written in the language was the exchange of goods for services idea. Thus the cost of doing business would be directly corresponding to the amount of money that was generated from the timber that was removed from the project. Steve Thompson states the deal that Regional Forester Dale Bosworth made with Conrad Burns in order to secure the stewardship demonstration projects came down to an issue of money, "When Bosworth asked Burns to support the draft legislation, Burns agreed but the experiment came with *zero* appropriated dollars. Stewardship contracting would have to pay for itself" (Thompson, personal conversation 2002). The delivered log concept, was no longer the foundation of the legislation, and goods for services was in the language that became part of the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act (Public Law 105-277). Without appropriated dollars from Congress, the only payment source for the completion of the stewardship work is from the revenue generated through harvesting timber. Timber harvest, within the larger concept of stewardship activities, is considered a

by-product of the management objective. Under the current legislation it is the means in which project work can be completed.

However, goods for services was not the only component that became part of the stewardship contracting legislation. Granted, goods for services has become the most contentious piece of the legislation, but the language within the legislation provides for a host of other possible scenarios to accomplish management objectives. Within the body of directives under section 347 of the Omnibus Appropriations bill, there lies the recognition that the interests of local communities should play a critical part in the formulation and subsequent monitoring of these projects. In the spirit of political maneuvering the agency and Burns allowed for some of the influences of community-based forestry movement to appear in the legislation. Congress was also eager to support broader legislation as well, with a groundswell of support for the enhancement of rural communities. But the inclusion of community provisions is also respectful of Chief Domback's vision for collaborative stewardship, along with the growing national recognition that community-based collaborative groups should have greater say in the management of public lands. Domback and his staff at the regional levels may not have had the same vision for stewardship contracting, but it appears there was enough lee way within the legislation to appease the parties interested in community collaboration. It becomes important to take a close look at the specific language and authorities granted to the Forest Service within the legislation to examine the opening that was created for local communities to play an active role in the management of stewardship contracts.

### **Chapter 3 – The Legislation and Community Based Ecosystem Management (CBEM)**

The influence that the CBEM movement had on the creation of the stewardship legislation is profound and the decision by Congress to include language and contractual mechanisms that reflect the movement's philosophy represents a fundamental shift in natural resource management policy. According to practitioners, the foundation on which CBEM rests is the notion that addressing ecosystem health must be concurrent with addressing the local communities whose livelihoods depend on those same natural systems (Ack et. Al., 2000). In effort to accomplish this goal, CBEM adheres to four major principles; Process, Stewardship, Reinvestment, and Monitoring (Gray and Kusel, 1998). While the stewardship contracting legislation, its authors and the USFS, do not plainly state that the pilot program is an attempt of CBEM, in many ways the stewardship contracting pilot program adheres to its four principles.

The legislation opens with the statement, "The Forest Service will enter into such contracts to perform services to achieve land management goals for the national forests that meet local and rural community needs" (P.L. 105-277, Sec. 347, (a)). While the exact meaning of the phrase "meeting the needs of local and rural communities" is vague, the language is significant because it recognizes connectivity between human communities and natural resource management. Again, this concept of connectivity between ecosystem management and community needs is the foundation of CBEM. The legislation then goes on to list

acceptable types of land management within the parameters of a stewardship contract. They include, among other things:

- a. road and trail maintenance or obliteration to restore or maintain water quality;
- b. Soil productivity, habitat for wildlife and fisheries, or other resource values;
- c. Setting prescribed fires to improve the composition, structure, condition, and health of stands or to improve wildlife habitat;
- d. Noncommercial cutting or removing of trees or other activities to promote healthy forest stands, reduce fire hazards, or achieve other non-commercial objectives;
- e. Watershed restoration and maintenance;
- f. Restoration and maintenance of wildlife and fish habitat; and
- g. Control of noxious and exotic weeds and reestablishing native plant species.

(Sec. 347, (b) 1-7).

These types of management activities demonstrate a commitment to improving the health of the forest ecosystem. According to Bradley Ack, a community forestry researcher, stewardship is defined as a, “philosophy of care for and commitment to the land....it is about the exercise of moral and civic responsibility to protect, restore, conserve, and prudently use the earth’s ecosystems and all that they sustain” (Ack, et.al., 2000). Because the stated goal of the legislation is to meet the needs of local communities, one can assume that the stewardship activities detailed in the legislation are designed to do just that. Clear recognition that improving the health of the land will also improve local communities is an important, transformative step for the USFS.

In order to accomplish these stewardship goals, Congress authorized the use of new contractual mechanisms to get the work done on the ground; the assumption is that before the stewardship legislation, the USFS did not have the proper management tools to achieve these desired outcomes. In theory, many of

these contractual mechanisms can be interpreted as the beginnings of a shift towards CBEM or at least, they began to adhere to the four governing principles of CBEM. The new contracting mechanisms that were introduced in the legislation are as follows:

- 1) Best value contracting
- 2) Local preference
- 3) Designation by description
- 4) Goods for services
- 5) Retention of Receipts

Best-value contracting allows the agency to hire a contractor based on quality land management practices, rather than the lowest bid for the job. The idea behind this provision is if quality stewardship forestry is the goal of these pilot projects, the agency must have the discretion to hire contractors that have proven themselves as qualified operators. The best value contracting provision indicates that the USFS understands that quality work on the ground requires an investment and a commitment to hiring operators that understand the concept of land stewardship.

Included within the legislation is a contractual provision that also allows the USFS to give “local”, qualified operators first preference when awarding contracts. This provision is important within the CBEM rubric for several reasons. First is the recognition that hiring people that live and work in close proximity to the resource base is beneficial for local economies. In turn this investment in a local labor force will produce meaningful results in terms of ecosystem health. By hiring people that have first-hand, empirical knowledge of the resource base, local contractors have an advantage in terms of their

understanding of the system in which they work. Investing in local communities and helping to sustain regional economies, while maintaining the health and integrity of the forest landscape, is an important component of CBEM (Kemmis, 1990). Along these same lines, the “designation by description” mechanism allows the contractor to make on-the-ground decisions as to the appropriate treatment for the forest unit. Rather than the USFS marking every tree that needs to be cut, contractors using their experience and best management practices can make those choices on the ground as the project dictates. It then makes sense to use local contractors that have the capabilities to make those important, on-the-ground decisions (Brown, 2000).

The most controversial of the new contractual mechanisms is the ability for the USFS to exchange goods (timber) for services (the restoration activities). The “goods for services” provision allows monies generated from the sale of timber to be used on the Forest from which it came to finance the restoration activities. Typically money generated from the sale of timber is returned to the federal treasury. While criticism of the goods for services provision is valid - a perverse incentive for district rangers to increase timber harvests to generate more money for “restoration activities” - the Congress and USFS recognizes that if restoration work is going to occur, it needs to be financed somehow. Until there is political will to appropriate congressional funds for forest restoration, goods for services will become the tool of choice for land managers to acquire dollars to pay for on the ground projects.

The retention of receipts component of the legislation specifically amends federal legislation to allow timber dollars to remain on the Forest in which they were generated. This is the mechanism that allows the goods for services provision to really impact the budgets of district rangers. Money that typically was returned to the treasury is now kept on the forest to pay for service activities.

The final piece of the legislation that represents a shift from traditional resource management is the congressional mandate that requires the agency to use multi-party monitoring to evaluate the success of each project. According to the language in the legislation, monitoring groups may be composed of “cooperating government agencies, including tribal governments, and any interested groups or individuals” (Sec. 347, (g)). Multi-party monitoring requires the participation of persons outside the ranks of the USFS in an effort to collect information on the ecological and social outcomes that result from a stewardship contracting project (Bliss et. Al., 2000). ). The process of monitoring and the subsequent evaluation of projects places value on the efforts of the stewardship pilot program, thus creating space for modifications and adjustments of projects that will improve upon existing and or future projects. Gerry Gray and Jonathan Kusel write, “Because we don’t know everything about how an ecosystem works, all ecosystem management is a kind of experiment. To learn from our successes and failures requires monitoring of ecological, biological, social, and economic conditions” (Gray and Kusel, 1998. pg 28). Hence, monitoring can be an effective learning tool for managers and community stakeholders.



There is a clear relationship between the stewardship contracting legislation, its provisions and the CBEM movement. Stewardship, reinvestment, and monitoring, three of the four tenants of CBEM, all appear as major components of the legislation. While participatory process is not clearly defined within stewardship contracting projects, it may be the most important piece of CBEM. The next section illustrates the significance of the process of community involvement in the management of natural resources.

### **Public Participation within CBEM**

Historically non-federal agency persons have not been engaged in a meaningful dialogue within the process of natural resource management on public lands. Submitting public comments, testifying at town meetings, and using the court system to appeal agency decisions are the standard avenues in which concerned citizens can impact the choices of land managers. While these facets of public participation are essential to ensure that national interests regarding environmental protection are considered by management agencies, the bureaucratic structure and the formal nature of these outlets often discourage proactive citizen participation. Jonathen Kusel writes:

Over the last three decades, public involvement in federal land management has been generally treated as both a mandated activity and a necessary evil rather than as a part of an active process integral to learning and successful management. Agency responses to mandated requirements were often formal and characterized by rigid compliance with procedures, since satisfying legal requirements frequently held higher priority than meeting the spirit of the law (Kusel et al, 1996. pg. 614).

Rather than engaging citizens in a meaningful participation process, management agencies have been content to acquire the input of the public in a manner that reacts to agency decisions.

Degraded ecosystems and impoverished rural communities provide evidence of the negative impacts as a result of traditional natural resource management (Barker, 1997). A new paradigm in natural resource management that is emerging recognizes the interdependence between healthy ecosystems and the well-being of rural communities (Gray et. Al., 2001). Again, community-based ecosystem management (CBEM) is a term recently used in the US to describe an adaptive approach to natural resource management that relies on quality land stewardship and cooperation between diverse groups of people, to create sustainable communities of place and healthy ecosystems.

A fundamental component of CBEM is the process in which local communities and land managers can share and exchange ideas about the management of natural resources. While there is no specific language within the legislation that mandates public participation within the design of pilot projects, a requirement of the monitoring piece is to assess “the role of local communities in the development of contract plans” (Sec. 347, (g)). As steering committees, stewardship groups, and collaborative partnerships, residents have felt that stewardship contracting has given them the opportunity to participate in resource management. In the spirit of the CBEM movement, a civic conservation has emerged in these specific places to challenge traditional resource management. By examining the process in which these groups are operating it is possible to

evaluate the stewardship pilot program and how effectively the program is set up to include local communities in the decision making process.

Practitioners of CBEM feel that after decades within the system of the public comment process, the voice of the community has been misinterpreted and discounted by public land managers (Gray and Kusel, 1998). The process that CBEM adheres, seeks inclusion of the community voice from inception to implementation of management decisions; the process is a continual planning endeavor rather than an ad hoc tabulation of public perception (Walker and Daniels, 2001). Ack et. al write:

At their best, CBEM efforts operate openly and transparently, are diverse and inclusive in their membership, encourage active and adaptive learning, facilitate collaborative decision making, build-trust among participants, and ultimately create a shared vision of ecological sustainability that is honored and pursued by the group collectively and by members individually (Ack et. al., 2001).

This comment captures the important properties of an effective process of CBEM.

For stewardship contracting to achieve its full potential, the participation process surrounding each specific project must include and be evaluated based on several fundamental principles. While there are many facets to a successful public participation process, the three components detailed below will serve as the evaluation criteria for the case studies found within this research.

### **#1 – Diversity**

Successful participation within community-based groups must include a broad and diverse array of participants or stakeholders. Within the context of this diverse group, participants must be open to a variety of ideas regarding

management decisions (Cestero, 1999). The more people that are involved in the process, resolution and consensus becomes more difficult to achieve, but the durability and the likelihood for lasting acceptance of a decision will be enhanced (Moote, 1997). Typically CBEM partnerships include governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, active citizens, and industry representatives each of which brings a variety of knowledge to the process. From indigenous understanding of natural systems, to agency science, to the realities of the free market, it is important to enter the process with many different perspectives.

It is also imperative that these perspectives must be considered of equal value. Empowering a minority group to feel that their input is treated with the same validity as those groups whose ideology represent dominant cultural paradigms is important component to a fair and egalitarian group process. If groups fail to include the views of various stakeholders within the process, these participants will most likely disengage and weaken the group as a whole (Moote et. al, 2000). On this point Ack et. al. Comment:

Most relevantly, there is a need to recognize the value in diverse knowledge systems and to have equal and direct funding for their programs. Only with this level of recognition and support can minority groups genuinely function as equal players. Herein lies the key to true empowerment and self-determination for diverse groups within a community. Here too is a key to their participation and sustained interest in CBEM (Ack et. al, 2000).

Enabling a diverse group of people, whose values are respected equally among the stakeholders, to engage in a meaningful dialogue with land managers is a critical component for effective public participation in the context of decisions that are made regarding public lands.

## **#2 Communication – Shared Learning and Civic Dialogue**

The views of a collection of diverse institutions and individuals differ, sometimes dramatically. Effective communication plays a tremendous role in the ability for these diverse stakeholders to understand various, divergent points of view. On the topic of effective communication, Ann Moote writes, “communication is the cornerstone of all partnerships, and often the variable that determines their success or failure. Effective communication builds trust and mutual respect and facilitates learning” (Moote, 2001. pg. 9). The formation of trust between participants within a CBEM partnership is critical for management projects to move forward. Trust is built as participants enter into a process of shared learning, using the knowledge base from each person to begin a greater understanding of the issues at hand. Don Snow, an experienced CBEM practitioner, describes this shared learning, “virtually all collaborative partnerships are learning circles in which participants cross fertilize and gain from each other’s expertise. This may be their most lasting value- a value that transcends the question of whether a given collaborative accomplished “policy reform or measurable change” (Snow, 2000. pg. 6). This type of shared learning will ultimately lead to a collaborative-decision making process, allowing for enhanced participation for various stakeholders.

In order to reach this level of understanding and mutual commitment the exchange of information, participants of the group process must engage in an

extensive civic dialogue to build this sense of cooperation. Ann Moote and

Hanna Cortner define a civic or active dialogue as:

Active dialogue allows the needs and concerns of each interested group or individual to be addressed during the planning process and permits the various participants to gain an understanding of each other's values, interests, and concerns, as well as the legal and policy constraints on agency decision-making (Moote and Cortner, pg. 98, 1999).

CBEM practitioner Sam Burns describes the relationship between cooperation and a civic conversation:

Common values for ecosystem and community sustainability have been quite adequate to sustain a civic conversation, to establish formal and informal networks, and to develop collaborative stewardship activities that are leading to real land resource improvement (Burns, pg. 282 2000).

While communication is the thread that holds collaborative groups together, it is the civic dialogue that maintains the ability for group members to understand one another and trust in the process. Burns also addresses the concept of social networks or the structure and format in which citizens come together to engage in the process. Providing various forums for individuals to access the group will help strengthen the network of civic engagement (Moote et. al., 2000). Through the use of a variety of tools formal meetings, potlucks, field trips, etc., community groups must create a diversity of participatory settings to accommodate the various needs and learning styles of the stakeholders. In doing so, the network of communication and trust will be enhanced and perpetuated. Timothy Duane, in an article describing participation in ecosystem management, states:

Any society- modern or traditional, authoritarian or democratic, feudal or capitalist- is characterized by networks of interpersonal communication and exchange, both formal and informal....Networks of civic engagement

are an essential form of social capital. The denser such networks in a community, the more likely that its citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit.... The understanding is that trust and cooperation generate further trust and cooperation (Duane, 1997. pg. 777).

Through a process of openly exchanging information and engaging in civic dialogue, stakeholders can develop trust and a level of communication to facilitate positive results on the ground.

### **#3 Power**

The ability for a community group to influence the outcome and implementation of a natural resource project is an essential component of meaningful participation. The power that a community possesses diminishes substantially if the work and effort invested in a project does not produce on the ground results. Douglass Kenney writes:

Success is presumably demonstrated by the development of processes that emphasize action over seemingly endless debate and study, and that articulate goals such as water quality improvements, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat, resource conservation, and related goals of environmental restoration (Kenney, 2000, pg. 189).

It is the action or implementation that helps define success for a community stakeholders. Part of this process of empowerment for a community group is first to recognize and articulate goals for a specific outcome.

The civic dialogue associated with communication will ultimately lead to a group's development of what it wants to see implemented on the ground (Wondolleck and Yafee, 2000). Allowing for common ground to move the group forward rather than harping on differences creates a sense of cooperation and

unity that becomes a powerful motivator for the entire participation process (Shutkin, 2000). Therefore it is essential for the group to clearly establish a vision for change as the primary vehicle for realizing a desired outcome. Without this articulation of a common vision, a community group can not expect to achieve a meaningful outcome on the ground and the results of a management decision will be a reflection of the desires of the agency not the community (Luzadis et. al., 2000).

With a well-developed plan of action, combined with a meaningful civic dialogue with the managing agencies, community groups are able to generate power and influence over the implementation of a project. If an agreement regarding management decisions is made between a collaborative group and an agency, fulfillment of that agreement becomes of vital importance for the realization of a meaningful participation process. Steve Yaffee and Julia Wondolleck write:

Respect and support the decisions of collaborative groups involving your agency. Commitment includes not just initiating collaborative processes, but also supporting actions that result from them. Agency leaders must be committed to following through on agreements reached.....One of the worst outcomes is for an agency that initiated a collaborative arrangement to fail to implement the resulting agreement (Wondoleck and Yaffee, 2000, pg. 227).

The validity of the CBEM movement is diminished if community groups can not influence the outcome of management decisions with tangible results on the ground.

A fundamental premise of the CBEM paradigm is a shared responsibility for land management decisions between communities of place and land



management agencies. This shift in resource management requires the relinquishment of some power from agencies to communities. The history of the USFS has been that of ultimate power over public forest management (Wilkinson, 1994). If meaningful public participation is to occur this notion must begin to change. Redefining how an agency pursues its interests or the creation of new alternatives for agencies to operate can alter the power structure over natural resource management (West, 1994). CBEM and, more specifically the stewardship contracting pilot program, creates an opportunity for the USFS to engage local people in a process of meaningful participation and transfers decision making power to local interests who seek to improve the socio-economic and environmental conditions of their communities.

#### **Chapter 4 - Case Study #1 – Lake Face Lamb Stewardship Project**

The Lake Face Lamb Stewardship project is located in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest on the Priest River Ranger District in northern Idaho (see map in appendix 2). There are several small communities of people that live within 25 miles of the project site; Priest River, Nordman, Lamb Creek, and Coolin compose a population of roughly 4,000 year-round residents (USFS, 1999). These rural towns are bordered by or nested within Federal, State and Timber industry forested lands and relied heavily on the timber industry for economic stability. Currently timber extraction does not play a major role in the regional economy and over the past decade the recreation and tourist industry have provided the region with an economic surge.

The proximity of the Priest Lake Basin to the population centers of Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, coupled with its beautiful forested setting and abundant recreational opportunities, has expanded the residential community dramatically. A significant problem with this growth is the intermingling of these residential properties within a forested ecosystem.

The urban/wild land interface is the term used to describe the transition between residential homes and forest lands (Miller, 1997). As more and more inhabitants of the west migrate to remote communities that are bordered or surrounded by forestlands, the threat of property loss due to wildfire dramatically increases. The build-up of fuel loads from decades of fire suppression, combined with forest stand compositions that are highly prone to fire, have put these lands at risk to catastrophic wildfire.

The Lakeface-Lamb Stewardship project's primary focus is on reducing the potential for wildfire within the residential and commercial development on Priest Lake. A USFS report to Congress describes the primary, on-the-ground objectives of the Lakeface-Lamb project:

Among the myriad of problems this area is experiencing include; declining forest health, a decrease of wildlife habitat availability, fuel buildup, exotic pest outbreaks, and diminished scenic integrity. The objectives of this 7171 acre project is to reduce the risk of fires to life and property; treat stands with insects and disease mortality or at high risk of crown fires; re-introduce fire into dry-site ecosystem (Pinchot Institute, 2001).

The project area is approximately 7200 acres, of which 2030 acres are private lands and 5100 acres are adjacent National Forest Lands. Within the project area live an estimated 275 year round residents, with another 1100 additional residents that inhabit the area in the summer months. Over 900 living structures are located within the project boundary, both on private and public land, and they have a value of hundreds of millions of dollars (USFS, 1999).

While the catalyst for the development of the Lakeface-Lamb stewardship project was the desire to address the urban wild land interface, in doing so, the pilot project allowed the agency to examine the needs of local communities. By expanding the ability of local community members to participate in the development of Lake Face Lamb project, the USFS recognized the new role that communities can play in resource management. USFS personal write:

Previously, public participation has meant reacting to predetermined agency proposals on a project-by-project basis. The proposed project would improve understanding about and confidence in agency policies and actions, including ecosystem management. Collaboration and cooperation would yield additional benefits including opportunities for mutual

learning, sharing science and other information, assisting with educational efforts, and increased ownership in decisions (USFS, 1999).

In effort to promote this type of learning and understanding of forest management the Priest lake Ranger District “will work with the Priest-Pend Oreille Communities to make sustainable forest ecosystem management real in the lives of those who live and work in them” (USFS, 1999). A testament to this philosophy of cooperation, local community members, in conjunction with the USFS co-authored the stewardship proposal that was submitted to the regional office. Through a series of community meetings the USFS and volunteer community stakeholders developed the following objectives for the project:

- Help the Priest-Pend Oreille Communities through community-based planning and land stewardship.
- Encourage individuals and community organizations to accomplish resource stewardship and conservation on an area-wide or watershed basis.
- Promote environmentally oriented economic development and jobs based on forest resources.
- Build rural links to address forest ecosystem health and integrity.
- Expand information, education, and outreach efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of sustainable forest management.
- Foster the alliance between research and technical assistance to forest products industries so that they can more profitably harvest small-diameter wood, increase the use of secondary markets for wood products, and market more finished wood products.

(USFS, 1999)

With the USFS willing to incorporate the philosophy of community based ecosystem management, the stage was then set for community stakeholders people to engage in meaningful public participation throughout the stewardship contracting process.

The Priest River Stewardship Committee (PRSC) formed in 1999 after the stewardship proposal was accepted by the Region 1 office. The formation of the

group largely depended on the leadership and motivation of a civic minded resident of the Priest Lake Basin (who will remain anonymous because of their involvement as a respondent in this research). This individual actively sought out residents within the community who might be interested in the stewardship project and organized meetings to discuss the project and the level of commitment that participation required. These meetings produced a set number of interested stakeholders who then became the stewardship committee. The stewardship committee is made up of ten members of the Priest Lake Basin communities. The purpose of the group is to actively participate in the stewardship contracting process to ensure that stewardship forestry was going to occur on the ground and that local people were going to gain employment as a result of the project work.

### **Group Diversity**

The Priest River Stewardship Committee has been meeting to discuss the Lake Face Lamb Stewardship project for over four years and continues to meet as the work progresses on the ground. The level of commitment and dedication displayed from this group is testament to the positive impacts that the PRSC has had on the project. The group's adherence to the CBEM principle of group diversity, through representation and an open and fair group process and procedures, has played a large part in their success.

From its inception, the committee organizers made a conscious effort to incorporate a wide variety of opinions into the dialogue regarding the project. According to an original member of the group, this was not such an easy task:

It was a challenge including the environmental perspective into the picture. Environmentalists have never fit into the community very well.

When folks in our group understood that sometimes the environmentalists are attacking things that *are* really wrong, not things that are perceived wrong, they were better accepted into the group. So I brought some down to the meetings, a few threw a fit at what we were doing and left. We ignored them and they came back. It was a process of building trust. They are still not all on board but it is getting better. In fact it is an environmentalist that heads up our monitoring program (forest consultant).

Commenting on his motivation to participate, the representative from the environmental community states:

There would be a lot of political fall out if my organization were not to participate in the process. It was easier for us to jump on board because of the non- controversial ecological nature of the project. This is a relatively risk free area and a good place for experimentation (conservationist).

The group's leadership understood that the inclusion of a diverse group of participants as steering committee members would help ensure a process that represented the wide variety of interests in the Priest Lake Basin. One committee member made it clear that her participation was an attempt to diversify the group:

The group wants diversity, they wanted a women on the committee. I have some environmental concerns as a private landowner to address forest restoration. I'm glad I can help round things out (timberland owner).

The cross section of people that eventually stuck together to form the steering committee included three local elected officials, a representative from the environmental community, a member of the timber industry, a small business owner, and representatives from each of the three towns that are in close proximity to the project area. What emerged from the formation process was a collection of people that all had some insight or set of experiences that could enhance the group as a whole. Broad involvement of community interests helps ensure that local values are respected. This was certainly the case with the PRSC.

Assembling a diverse group of people provides a solid foundation of a variety of perspectives in which community groups can build upon, however a fair and open group process is not ensured by simply bringing people together. The willingness to accept differences and acknowledge a set of operating procedures was essential for the group process to produce positive results:

As a committee we are trying to figure this process out. We are a unique group of people in terms of neutrality- we leave biases at the door. The steering committee has put in thousands of hours and together we are determined to see this thing be a success (forest consultant).

In order to achieve success, people that are working together as a group must establish norms that allow a free and open flow of discussion:

Everyone has something to offer in this group. We are committed to being respectful of others opinions and we do not pass judgements on people's ideas or suggestions. It makes things open and easy (retired educator).

The most positive aspect of this experience for me has been sitting down to discuss the project with a diverse group of people and we all respect one another! It has been great (timberland owner).

Through this commitment to providing a forum of respect and honoring differences, the Priest Lake Stewardship Committee has achieved a fair and open group process, that is anchored by its diversity.

### **Communication**

The cornerstone for successful community participation within CBEM is effective communication between the various stakeholders. Effective communication allows for open discussion and provides an avenue to reach agreements. This has been critical to the success of the PRSC. The PRSC has

been able to share knowledge and understand other perspectives of the relevant issues:

The dialogue with people has been really productive. Several years ago I would have been hung from the nearest lamppost, but that has changed. It is hard to demonize each other when you sit around the table and call each other by their first name (conservationist).

By listening to others point of view, as a group we learned from one another and built a solid relationship (wood products industry representative).

With this commitment to communication the PRSC has been able to develop trust which allowed them to move forward in their work:

As a community we are trying to make things better. These people possess a whole lot of knowledge on local forests. The strength of this group of people is we have been able to share that knowledge through hours and hours of hard work, despite our differences. That hasn't been easy. But now the group operates under complete transparency, we've built trust and gained friends and we can do creative things (forest consultant).

This commitment towards a civic conversation regarding the project became the operational foundation in which the PRSC could build upon. The ability of the PRSC to engage in a civic dialogue with the USFS regarding the scope and details of the project was essential for the group's successful participation within the stewardship project. It then became necessary for the group to develop a similar working relationship with the USFS.

The Priest Lake Basin communities have historically been excluded from the decision-making process regarding natural resources on public lands:

On the federal management of public lands the local opinion had become zero. Issues were decided on the national level or exclusively by the USFS. We were never given the opportunity to participate. Locals need input prior to decision-making (forest consultant).



Residents of the Priest Lake Basin saw the stewardship pilot program as an opportunity to engage the agency in a meaningful participation process:

The communication between communities and the USFS was shut down for so long. But now it seems like we are really working together. In the last few months they have been really helpful and cooperative – they want to see this project move forward..... But this attitude took some time (retired educator).

When the two groups first starting working together, the PRSC were frustrated by the slow moving nature of the bureaucracy. However as time passed, and communications began to progress, the PRSC's knowledge of agency operations improved. The relationship began to blossom and the PRSC gained a greater understanding of the agency:

The slow moving bureaucratic nature of the agency is the ultimate frustration for people – it inflamed members of the group. We were able to talk it out. The community people had to learn about the USFS, the levels of bureaucracy, and how easily the agency can be hamstrung by politics (forest consultant).

As planning for the project began to move forward, the two groups started drafting the service items that were going to be included within the contract. Unfortunately the partnership felt a major set back when the USFS learned that the PRSC was going to put together a project bid for the contract. Up until that point, the stewardship committee had begun to influence the service items that were to be slated into the contract, but when it came down to actually writing the contract the community group was excluded:

The community and the USFS worked collaboratively on developing the service end of things. However when it came to writing the contract, the USFS shut us out because we were going to place a bid. In our mind this hurt the process because we feel the agency designed a terrible contract (forest consultant).

By allowing a potential contractor the opportunity to write the contract that he was to bid on, the integrity of the contracting process would certainly be compromised, which would be a violation of federal law. At this point the strides that the PRSC had made in building a relationship with the agency were deteriorating. Members of the group felt they should discontinue participating all together.

However part of the process of engaging in a meaningful civic dialogue requires citizens to remain committed and active towards making change, despite adversity. Had the group completely pulled out from the process, all of their efforts and energy would have been lost:

When we weren't allowed to participate in the contracting component of the process, members of our group wanted out entirely. I then told them we would be back where we started, a community without a voice (forest consultant).

The PRSC stuck together. The group decided to make the best of the situation and sought to remain involved in the process. The PRSC began to realize that this type of conversation and relationship building between the USFS and the PRDC and the ultimate goal for meaningful on-the-ground results takes commitment and energy:

The relationship was still pretty good – not all folks within the agency are dancing naked around the fire with Satan (laughter). Beliefs within the USFS run the whole gamut. We are opposed and endorsed by different directions. The strategy is to identify people of good will and forge constructive relationships. It's a process to find allies within the agency (conservationist).

This optimistic attitude is indicative of the evolution of the group's attitude, which seemed to operate on a continuum of learning. Within the PRSC there is an understanding that by focusing on common goals and by engaging the USFS in a meaningful dialogue to achieve these goals, with a concerted effort, the group can overcome the obstacles they may find along the way. By remaining actively engaged with the stewardship project, the PRSC increased its capacity to positively affect the entire community.

This is evident in how the PRSC, despite its tumultuous relationship with the Forest Service, demonstrated its commitment by actively seeking opportunities to educate the general public about the stewardship project. Through the use of multi-media, field trips, and educational presentations the group sought to inform and engage the average citizen about the Lake Face – Lamb project:

Part of our goal was to inform our communities as to what we are trying to accomplish. Through newspaper and magazine articles, presentations to civic organizations, field trips, workshops for the contracting community we are trying to demonstrate we are invested in this project and want to see it be successful (retired educator).

We put together a series of educational symposiums to talk about the issues. We looked at the contracting community, engaged the science community, and provided general information so people could understand what was going on. It has all been encouraging and the dialogue with people has been really productive (wood products industry representative).

Educating the community at large was an important component of the communication process for the PRSC.

The next section examines how the PRSC was able to leverage themselves into a position to impact the implementation and prescription of the project. The ability to influence the process for the PRSC began with the establishment of common goals to focus the group's energy.

### **Power**

Through effective communication between the PRSC and the USFS, the PRSC has been able to work through the issues involved with the stewardship project and agree on some common goals to provide guidance for the group:

The group established the fact that we can work on this type of project together. It then became clear that we could all agree on what should be done in this area. This is a highly visible area with lots of tourism. Right now the integrity of the forest needs to be upheld. There is a lot of junk - a lot of toothpicks lying on the ground. What we want is some quality work to be done to improve the current situation (retired educator).

The project itself is about doing the right thing for the forest and the land. The USFS identified a piece of ground that we all agreed needed help (timberland owner).

I recognize the inevitability of a restoration agenda on public lands. We have had seventy years of fire suppression, a history of high-grade commercial logging, and a significant impact on the successional dynamic of the forest; benign neglect is not a viable option at this point, especially with encroachment by housing and infrastructure. We are going to have to intervene in these systems if we are ever going to see a return to some semblance of natural function (conservationist).

The restoration component of the project was of paramount importance to the PRSC. It was clear to the committee that the project site was originally developed because of its proximity to residential communities and the tourist infrastructure that is essential to the well being of the local economy. Catastrophic fire, because of the tremendous fuel loading, would devastate the basin. The ability for the group to articulate this primary concern provided for a

cohesive direction in which to focus their energy and efforts. Their unified message for to the agency was:

If stewardship contracting is about restoration, let's focus on the forest instead of building things that don't fix anything. It's the forest that needs tending and it can't do it on its own. It needs assistance (forest consultant).

Thus, according to the PRSC, the on the ground work that the service contracts provide within the framework of the of the Lake-Face Lamb Stewardship project needed to be focused on restoration. Projects that were out of the scope of restoration were placed at the bottom of the priority list for the PRSC. Under typical circumstances, local community interests may have little or no influence on a decision made by the USFS regarding project specifics. Again, the goal of the stewardship contracting program is to foster a participatory role for communities, so in the case of the Lake face Lamb project, the communities desire for forest restoration became valued information for the agency:

The community was very much into the project. We all took several field trips that looked at the project. There were demonstration areas to show people what treatments might look like on the ground. From these visits we had conversations about what the community folks wanted to see accomplished through this project (USFS representative).

With this knowledge the USFS included the communities' prescription for forest restoration within the project site. How the forest was to be thinned, how the timber was going to be removed, and what was going to be left on the ground were components of the project that were developed by the PRSC.

Of equal importance to the PRSC was the group's goal to see that the local work force would gain employment through the stewardship project:

Keeping jobs in the area is a huge economic benefit of the stewardship project. Having people employed once again in the woods will help bring some pride back into our little town (retired educator).

During the group's discussion on how they wanted to influence the various contracting components of the project, members of the committee continued to come back to the "local preference" piece of the legislation. According to the legislation, local communities, in conjunction with the agency have the responsibility of defining what constitutes local:

As a group, we decided that jobs must stay in the Priest Lake area. From harvesting to millwork, we want these jobs staying home. If we have control over the work force, it's harder for a multi-national corporation to come in and ruin our forest. We want to have ownership of this thing (wood products industry representative).

When the discussion came down to the local criteria, it was pretty unanimous that we all defined that to mean Priest River, Nordman, Lamb Creek, you know the towns right around here. Some of the wood could be sent to mills further south, but still in Idaho and still in the region (retired educator).

The group's commitment to these two specific goals, forest restoration and invigorating the local economy through the creation of job opportunities, provided clarity to their discussion of the project with the agency. However there were still certain elements of the project with which the group was not satisfied. The stewardship committee felt that the agencies internal monitoring regiment left them unaccountable in the event that the work was not completed to the desired specification. A third goal emerged from the workings of the collaborative group, that was to create the ability to successfully bid on the stewardship contract.

As explained earlier, the PRSC was unable to participate in the contract writing component of the process. The group firmly believed that if they were awarded the contract, they could effectively ensure the outcome of the project. The contract was written and they had significant influence over its content, but the ownership they sought over the project could only come through acquisition of the contract:

Our thinking was that if we could be awarded the contract, even though it was not written how we wanted it, we then had the right to change it. If you buy something and it is bad you are entitled to complain about it. If we want to change what is going on in the forest we have got to participate (forest consultant).

The PRSC had the internal capacity to make a competitive bid to the UFS for the project. The group applied for non-profit status (501c3) in order to solidify its standing as a legitimate competitor in the bidding process. In order to be eligible for bidding, a contractor, or in this case a 501c3, must have a bond to ensure the financial capability to complete the work was present. The Priest River Development Corporation (PRDC), a non-profit agency whose mission is to develop sustainable, local businesses in the Priest Lake Basin, provided a million dollar bond to the PRSC. The PRDC saw the project as an opportunity to create jobs and invest in the local labor force of the Priest Lake Basin. The PRSC then entered the competitive bidding process and were subsequently awarded the Lake Face Lamb Stewardship Contract.

This was an unprecedented step for a community organization. To date, the PRSC is the only 501c3 to be awarded a stewardship contract. The power to control the outcome of the project largely rests in the hands of the PRSC and the

PRDC. Because the stewardship project is a demonstration program, the group had the ability to modify details of the contract. They have the power to review and hire the subcontractors to perform the work. The USFS will monitor, along with other community members, the outcomes of the various components of the contract, but the PRSC and the PRDC developed their own internal monitoring standards to ensure high quality work:

When the USFS designed the contract, they basically said here is what the contractor is to do. They never stated what the desired outcome of the project was to look like on the ground. This gave them a clear out from accountability. As the contract holder, we have now created our own internal monitoring program that specifies that we won't monitor the work until it is clear to us what the desired outcome on the ground is going to be. We are trying to force the USFS to provide for the correct result on the ground. The folks on the district level are smiles from ear to ear (forest consultant).

It was this commitment to ensure quality stewardship work was going to be completed that enabled the PRSC and PRDC to be awarded the contract from the USFS:

The group had really done their homework. We set up an evaluation process with established criteria to review the bids for the contract. Half of the evaluation was reflective of cost and the other half was the technical aspect of the project – how well they were going to do the job on the ground and their commitment to hiring local people. There were several bids reviewed and there's was certainly the strongest (USFS representative)

By organizing themselves as a 501c3, the PRSC effectively demonstrated how a community group could access power within the parameters of a stewardship contract. By focusing on common goals and articulating a vision for implementation, followed by an aggressive pursuit for implementation, the PRSC



fully capitalized on the participation component of the stewardship contracting pilot program.

A summary of the Priest Lake Case, nested within the framework of the evaluation criteria demonstrates that the group was able to achieve meaningful participation:

Topic	Criteria 1	Criteria 2
Group Diversity	Representation ++	Fair/Open Procedures ++
Communication	Shared Learning ++	Civic Dialogue ++
Power	Influence ++	Impact on the Ground ++

The “+” symbol signifies that criteria was present based on the preponderance of evidence found within the interview process.

++ = exceptional, + = good, 0 = not present, - = poor, -- = very poor

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## **Chapter 5 - Case #2 – The Yaak Stewardship Project**

The Yaak Community Stewardship Project sits on the South Fork of the Yaak River within northwest Montana's Kootenai National Forest. The Yaak Valley is extremely remote and sparsely populated (see map in appendix 4). The community of Yaak's population did not appear on the 2000 census data, but residents in the valley estimate the year-round population to be 100. Troy and Libby are the closest population centers to the Yaak and their combined population is 3,600 people (2000 census). Lincoln County hosts all three population centers, and within its 3,675 square miles, live 18,837 people (2000 Census data).

Similar to the Priest lake basin, Lincoln County is rich in the tradition of timber extraction and the Post World War II timber boom carried the Lincoln county economy for much of the second half of this century. Recently this paradigm has shifted. Technological advances in industry, over harvesting, environmental regulation, and a depressed timber economy have transformed these once timber dependent communities. Timber harvest and its related industries no longer provide a major source of income for residents of Lincoln County. Like many rural counties and towns in the western U.S., an economy based heavily on the service industry now plays a dominant role in the region's economy (Rasker, 2000).

However, entrenched within the remoteness and the vast forestlands of Lincoln county, is an ideology that timber extraction can and should still have a

profound impact on the regional economy. Contrary to this belief is a growing notion that, while creating local employment opportunities for displaced timber workers is important, maintaining the ecological integrity of the landscape is vital for the well being of Lincoln County communities. These varying perspectives are often times at odds with one another and this regional dichotomy is ever apparent in the Yaak Valley.

In the Fall of 1998 interested members of the Yaak community began a dialogue with USFS personnel from the Three Rivers Ranger district about the possibility of designing and implementing a stewardship project on the Kootenai NF. Over the course of the next several years, members of the Yaak community, working in conjunction with the USFS, developed the Yaak Community Stewardship Project (YCSP).

The YCSP is a small component of a larger project that the USFS had planned for the Kootenai Forest. The USFS had all ready completed the environmental assessment of the Clay Beaver project. The Yaak community figured that working on a small segment of a project that had all ready gone through the NEPA process would allow their proposal to move rapidly through the bureaucracy. The stewardship project itself is 256 acres in size and is divided up into 8 treatment units. These units are focused within the South Fork of the Yaak River. Once again fuels reduction within the urban wildland interface is a priority of the YCSP. The USFS writes that the primary goals of the project are the following:

- To reduce hazardous fuel levels (particularly adjacent to private property and community features such as the Yaak community center) and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire while capturing the value of wood fiber.
- To improve wildlife habitat for many species that inhabit the Yaak valley, including deer, elk, and bear.
  - To increase local employment opportunities and enhance local job skills.
  - To restore area streams to improve habitat for resident fish populations and improve water quality for domestic users and other uses.
  - Involvement of the community in the project development and implementation to meet community needs and to promote collaborative outcomes.
  - To restore forest vegetative diversity while providing wood products to support the local economy.

Again, by listing the involvement of the community as a project goal, the USFS has eluded to the importance of participation within the framework of stewardship contracting.

The story of the Yaak Stewardship committee, how it was formed, its relationship with the USFS, and how the Yaak community has engaged in the participation process is quite fascinating. The events that have taken place surrounding the stewardship project indicate that the capacity for meaningful participation, within the framework of CBEM, is possible despite the polarized community of interests present in the Yaak Valley.

### **Group Diversity**

In 1997 a nonprofit organization called the Yaak Valley Forest Council (YVFC) was formed to address the need for protection of the last roadless areas in the Yaak valley while simultaneously promoting the development of a sustainable local economy. In doing so one of the main goals of the YVFC was:

To bring historically polarized groups to the same table to begin meaningful dialogue to find common ground on issues surrounding forest management practices. Regardless of what the perfect way for sound ecological forest management is, we are now at a place where people are

on the landscape. In the Yaak, humans are not separate from the landscape and we need to balance the relationship between humans and the Yaak ecosystem in ecologically sound ways. So we believe in sustainable everything, including harvesting timber and we certainly catch flack from ecological groups (environmentalist).

When the authority was given to the USFS in 1999 for stewardship contracting, the YVFC approached the Three Rivers Ranger district about the possibility of a project on the Yaak. Because of the political climate in the valley, the YVFC was careful in how they introduced the stewardship contracting concept to the rest of the Yaak community:

Lincoln County is a very distrustful place for any kind of ecological movement. It's extremely polarized, there is lots of fear, and large barriers to overcome. We knew that the idea of stewardship had to be introduced to the community by the USFS and that the agency could not show favoritism towards the YVFC. So the forest service called a community meeting to explain stewardship contracting, the YVFC gave a pitch supporting this type of project and there was immediate opposition (environmentalist).

This immediate opposition to the stewardship project was not a misperception by the YVFC:

The whole thing started out when the YVFC introduced the project to the community with the USFS. Folks did not want to see the enviros having more control over the project. This motivated me to keep going to the meetings to find out what was really going on (local businessman).

The Yaak community, for the most part views the YVFC as a group of communists and the stewardship project they introduced was a communist ploy having something to do with wilderness (outfitter).

Regardless of how the project was introduced to the community, the concept of stewardship was endorsed by the agency and subsequently had to be addressed by the Yaak community. It was then up to residents of the Yaak to organize themselves in order to participate within the framework of stewardship

contracting. Attendees of the first meeting agreed that the formation of a steering committee to represent the interests of the community was an appropriate next step. A subsequent meeting followed to determine the make-up of a Yaak Valley stewardship committee.

The YVFC posted fliers around town and made a concerted effort to spread the word about the up-coming meeting. Their intention was to motivate Yaak residents to participate openly about the management issues that a stewardship project could address on the forest:

We told people that we wanted to set up a community meeting and set up a stewardship steering committee. Our hope was that this would set the stage for meaningful community dialogue to bring people together for a real project- not just ideas (environmentalist).

Jaws dropped to the floor when they realized that the YVFC was advocating putting people to work, working together as a community, putting aside some of that hatred and animosity that has been going on for years, and accomplishing some work that we have been bitching about to the USFS for years (outfitter).

What ensued at the meeting was a very heated dialogue regarding how stewardship committee members were to be chosen:

Bodies were sore after the meeting, it was emotionally draining. As a community we could not agree to vote for members of the committee. People just volunteered to be on it. We ended up with a nine member committee – three from the left, 3 from the middle, 3 from the right in terms of their politics (environmentalist).

Within the newly formed stewardship committee, there was a faction that felt they could not move the project forward with people of such diverse viewpoints:

The people who volunteered for the committee felt strongly about the issues. As it stood the group couldn't get organized to decide who was in charge. We weren't getting anywhere (local businessman).

The group had a facilitation process to reconcile differences within the group but there was an element that did not like anything that members of the Yaak Valley Forest Council had to say and there did not seem to be anything to do about that. From that faction another meeting was called and a survey was passed out, which determined a new fate for the stewardship committee (environmentalist).

The survey asked residents of the Yaak to identify the priority issues surrounding the stewardship contract. Also included in the survey was a mechanism to vote down the size of the stewardship committee and elect the committee based on a ballot vote:

The survey was generated by one side of the stewardship committee, it was passed out in the tavern, and the entire Yaak community was not informed. It was a bum rush process. It was pretty clear that they did not want the Yaak Valley Forest Council on the committee. So they kicked most of us off. A moderate member of the YVFC remained on the committee, along with another moderate member of the community. The final three committee members that were voted on by the survey are all very pro-logging. The entire process was not fair, but that is the way it goes up here. The YVFC decided that we were still committed to the project and were willing to let it go and see it move forward (environmentalist).

What became the stewardship committee in the Yaak was not a fair representation of the cross section of interests present in the community. I believe the creation of the survey by a certain ideology within the community and then the subversive distribution of the survey did not demonstrate a fair and open procedure within the framework of CBEM. The process which the YVFC used to initially bring forward the stewardship project to the community and the attempt they made

include all Yaak community members during the first meeting, was an effort to reconcile the diversity issue. Once people who identified themselves as interested in the participation process were excluded from the committee, the Yaak community lost some of its ability to achieve meaningful participation.

### **Communication**

The formation of the steering committee may not have produced optimum results in terms of representation, but the civic dialogue that begun as a result of the stewardship project demonstrated that meaningful participation was still possible in the Yaak Valley. The creation of the investigative survey, regardless of the questionable equity of its distribution and its end results, is an example of action. In response to the active role that the YVFC plays responding to USFS policy, other community members were compelled to participate or face the consequence that the Forest Council would have significant influence over what happens on the ground:

The YVFC is generally very active with USFS policy. The YVFC creates interest by always being present thus forcing other and opposing community voices to be active. The whole one up theory. Therefore in a weird convoluted way we have increased the participation. It turned out to be a popularity contest and power tripping, but everyone has got a point of view, its not about right and wrong. And its not about whining (environmentalist).

The creation of a survey by a group of people who generally are not motivated to respond to potential USFS projects becomes significant in terms of an emerging civic dialogue. One of the survey's authors explains the intention behind the survey:



The USFS should have put together the survey but the way things were going we had to do it. Our goal was to see what people in the Yaak wanted to see happen in the forest. We all know that work needs to get done on the ground, the survey was designed to ascertain the following: 1) Is there community support for the proposal, 2) What are the communities priorities for land management, 3) What they hope stewardship would accomplish, 4) Is the community comfortable with a steering committee of nine. The real goal was to get the community all thinking about the project (local businessman).

What emerged from this process is a steering committee that must now enter into a conversation with the USFS, as representatives of the Yaak community, to determine the scope and the characteristics of the project. The authors of the survey and the members of the committee are clearly concerned about the community of Yaak and how the forests are managed. While they have had opinions in the past on these issues, the stewardship project engages them to act.

Following the selection of the steering committee there were a series of field trips to explore potential project sites. In attendance at these site visits were the USFS, the stewardship committee, and “excluded” members of the YVFC:

We sat in a circle and decided on a prescription for the project. The YVFC, the stewardship committee and the USFS... The stewardship committee was hoping that we would go away, but we didn't. Hadn't the YVFC stuck with the project, even after getting booted off the stewardship committee, the project would have never got off the ground. The folks on the steering committee are committed but don't have the same passion about the project as we do. One member kept the fire lit within the group, the others have hung in there, we keep the fire going. They have stayed because of our influence (environmentalist).

While the stewardship committee was committed to the project, the Forest Council was instrumental in keeping the process moving forward, despite the opinions of one member of the stewardship committee:

I have no time for the agenda of the YVFC, just the opposite. Their program seems to be one of delay, nitpicking and endless stalling (logger).

However, over the course of several months and many discussions in the field, the Stewardship Committee, with input from the USFS and the YVFC, reached consensus as to how the project should proceed and felt encouraged by how the agency was facilitating the process:

In order for any stewardship project to function it would have to move forward quickly. There is a lot of delay in the USFS. It helped to have all ready gotten the NEPA out of the way (logger).

The USFS is listening to us. They come out and say that everyone wants to see these things work and provide us with as much information as possible. The level of trust is getting better between the community and the USFS. The people of the Yaak want to see work get done in the forest and we want local people to make decisions about the forest. It helps when the forest service is out there on the ground asking us what we want to see happen (local businessman).

With the USFS willing to engage the community in a meaningful dialogue about the project, the committee felt satisfied with the project's potential. To some degree, the stewardship committee was able to reconcile the fact that the YVFC was not about to disappear from the dialogue. What ensued from this continued conversation was a process of shared learning and a slow building of cooperation among the various stakeholders:

We are a diverse group of people trying to figure this thing out. We are not professionals in the forest industry but we have lots of ideas of how things should be managed. There is still a lot of tension between the different groups, but the process has opened our eyes to a variety of backyard issues. (local businessman).

For us to sit in a circle and make an agreement is huge. We would want the project to look different, but we understand that we are not the only people who live here. The concessions we made we could live with and

are hopeful that future projects can be better, that trust can be built. Part of this project is an attempt to build trust in the community (environmentalist).

It definitely was a unifying experience. We learned a lot from each other. It has been a battle, lots of politics exist in this community. It is not just going to go away, its part of life up here (outfitter).

During the entire process what has emerged as the pivotal motivating force in the Yaak was the goal of accomplishing work on the ground. The civic dialogue and the shared learning that occurred in the Yaak was a result of the stewardship committee and YVFC's pursuit for control and influence over a USFS management decision.

### **Power**

The catalyst for civic engagement in the Yaak was for the voice of the community to be heard and implemented into action. "Having a say" became the rallying cry for the people involved with the Yaak stewardship project. What emerged from the meetings, field trips, and countless hours of discussions was a proposal for a stewardship project that was generated by the residents of the Yaak valley:

Working with the USFS, we as a community decided to clip a piece off an existing project for the Yaak stewardship proposal. The NEPA had all ready been done and the project was sitting there ready to go. The community felt good about a smaller scale just to get our feet wet with stewardship (outfitter).

The USFS had done a good job of working with the people that are interested in working with the agency. They are listening to suggestions made by local people (retired logger).

The Yaak community for all intent and purposes designed the project in the Yaak – we dotted the i's and crossed the t's, with the help of the

USFS. We marked tress and measured units. I think that stewardship contracting is a way for communities to quite literally have a say in what goes on in there own backyard (outfitter).

While the group was guided in the process by the Kootenai N.F and the Three Rivers Ranger District, the sense of empowerment that the community felt through their participation is undeniable:

When we did the survey, the community's overwhelming response was to get this program off the ground. And that is what we are working on. When our proposal was accepted in the Region, it was like, hey, we can do this thing (retired logger).

We got over the first hurdle and this community has the wear-with-all to keep this thing going. The great thing about this will be when we see results on the ground (outfitter).

Creating the proposal was an important first step for achieving a sense of influence over management decisions. However, in the case of the Yaak, the proof of a successful stewardship project and meaningful participation will only occur when work is accomplished on the ground.

Returning loggers to the forest and generating revenue from the sale of timber were clearly the most important goals for the majority of the Yaak stewardship committee and the larger Yaak community. Of the 71 people within the Yaak Valley that responded to the committee's survey, timber production was the most important component of the project for 36 of those people. Fuels reduction, employment opportunities, and economic stability also surfaced as very important community goals:

I'm all for preserving the lifestyle of the logger. In the Yaak it seems like the people on the Stewardship Committee are pro-timber and want to see

projects occur. The stewardship plan is a good thing as long as we can implement the projects. This is what I'm for, a plan that creates jobs, makes the Yaak a secure place to live, and you can get done what you need to in the forest (retired logger).

This project is a "goods for services" contract i.e. timber is being traded for services such as stream restoration, roads, trails, tree planting, etc, etc.. Obviously the more value of goods, i.e. timber, the more services can be returned to the area. That is the whole point (logger).

This project has the capabilities to get the wood flowing. The service contacts open a wide variety of employment opportunities, it's a window to create more jobs. Locally there are a lot of people in the area who are qualified to get the work done. We could sure benefit from that around here (local businessman).

When we talk about local in the proposal, local refers to the Yaak. First priority in the contract specifically calls for local Yaak loggers. Absolutely preference is for the Yaak (outfitter).

In many ways the stewardship program brings a renewed sense of hope for people living in the Yaak whose traditional way of earning a living has unraveled over the years. A common perception in the Yaak Valley of the stewardship pilot program, is that projects are an opportunity to give local people more control over public forests:

This is a strong logging community, logging has played an important historical role in the area and there has been lots of benefits to the area because of that. Now we need to let local people make decisions about the forest because we are the ones living out here. People from Washington D.C., from other places around the country or the state even, they don't live here. I'd rather have the locals coming up with policy (local businessman).

We want to keep the work local, we want to keep our dollars here, and we want to use our local knowledge to decide what is best for the forest. Stewardship is a tool to help us get there (retired logger).

With more control over management plans residents of the Yaak feel there could be a revitalization of an extractive economy, while at the same time, an effort to address the needs of the forest.

However, the Yaak Valley Forest Council feels the stewardship committee does not have the best interests of the forest in mind and that true forest stewardship means more than getting people to work in the woods:

Stewardship contracting is not just about logging, timber is a piece of this project. Restoring the forest is equally as important (outfitter).

For me the goal of the project is not to maximize board feet production but to make the unit be healthy (environmentalist).

For this faction of the community monitoring the outcomes of the project and the ecological impacts of the proposed timber harvests, becomes critical:

How the monitoring comes down is a huge part of my willingness to support future stewardship contracts. We have applied to be on the monitoring committee. The USFS has invited us to be a part of the process, but it is up to the committee (environmentalist).

But for the sake of the greater Yaak community, the YVFC was able to accept the conditions of the proposal and allow the project to move forward:

Ecologically speaking we made compromises in how much timber was coming out versus the amounts to leave in islands. But we signed off from a community stand point (environmentalist).

The importance of this position by the YVFC is significant in terms of how much they are willing to sacrifice in order for implementation to occur

can not be understated. The group's willingness to move forward despite some concerns with the prescription and monitoring program demonstrates how important this project is to the health of the Yaak community. Again, the unifying voice in the Yaak is:

Let's get something done on the ground, because without that accomplishment, all our work is meaningless (local businessman).

At this point, project implementation rested solely in the hands of the USFS.

The USFS Region 1 office approved the Yaak Stewardship Project proposal in May of 1999. In the summer of 1999 the Alliance for the Wild Rockies (AWR) filed a lawsuit against the Kootenai and Idaho Panhandle National Forests specifically identifying the Clay Beaver Project. The lawsuit centered around implementation of a new grizzly bear management policy by the USFS without amending agency forest plans. Since the Yaak Stewardship Project was originally part of the Clay Beaver project it became part of the lawsuit filed by AWR and was temporarily halted. The Stewardship project would be delayed from the summer of 1999 through the Spring of 2001 and this delay had significant effect on the participants involved with the project:

The AWR lawsuit shut the whole unit down and with it any chance of the project moving forward within a reasonable timeframe (local businessman).

The delay has for all practical purposes pretty much killed any value the so called project might have had originally (logger).

In addition to the AWR lawsuit, the Yaak community was experiencing delay from the USFS even after the agency was given the green light to move forward on the stewardship project. The USFS attributed delays in getting the contract prepared and the Request for proposals out to the contracting community to "extremely heavy workloads on both the District and Forest during the summer of 2001 and several vacant positions remaining unfilled" (USFS 2001). During this time frame, the Yaak stewardship committee had been tolerant of the delay, but began to lose its patience:

We intended to to get this thing started last year (2001), after the lawsuit was settled, the USFS was not ready to move on the project right away. It's not a big project, its small scale, there is nothing difficult about it. Here we are in the Yaak coming 180 degrees as a community, wading through the mis-trust, working through the meetings and the USFS can't get it together (outfitter).

We have had *years* of discussion and nothing's underway (retired logger).

The Yaak Stewardship contract was not produced until the summer of 2002. Its content was developed in conjunction with the stewardship committee. The contract was awarded in late October, with hopes to begin work on the ground as soon as possible. After nearly four years of talking about stewardship contracting, implementation is now set to occur:

God we wished this thing would have gone out much sooner. But what can you do. The USFS did what they could to make it happen, the delays we experienced are all part of forest management. The USFS is a big bureaucracy. I can say till the end though they really worked with us to hear our voice and get the specifications and guidelines of the contract lined out. The USFS wrote the legal language but it was the steering committee that described what work should be done on the ground. And now it's going to happen (local businessman).



To say the least, this thing has been frustrating. But now that the contract is out, we feel a sense of accomplishment. The good thing is now they'll be some jobs in the area and that is the best thing for this community (retired logger).



For the greater good of the community, the YVFC was able to let the process move forward and still have some influence over the outcome. The civic dialogue and shared learning that followed during field trips and meetings was an instrumental piece for the Yaak community to influence the USFS. The group agreed that the USFS was willing to listen to ideas about the design of the project and incorporate the community's desires into, first the proposal, and then the contract. Delays frustrated the group but in the end the Stewardship Committee persevered. The USFS empowered the group to engage in meaningful participation within the context of the stewardship project and ultimately the Yaak community will see their project implemented on the ground.

A summary of the Yaak Valley Case, nested within the framework of the evaluation criteria demonstrates that the group was able to achieve meaningful participation, despite the tensions found within the community:

| Topic           | Criteria 1        | Criteria 2              |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Group Diversity | Representation -  | Fair/Open Procedures -- |
| Communication   | Shared Learning + | Civic Dialogue +        |
| Power           | Influence ++      | Impact on the Ground ++ |

## **Chapter 6 - Case # 3 Paint Emery Stewardship Project**

The Paint Emery Stewardship project is located in Montana's Flathead Valley in the Flathead National Forest (see map in appendix 3). The Flathead County has an area of 5,246 miles and its total population is 74,471 (2000 census). The Valley is home to Flathead Lake, a vast fresh water body which offers spectacular scenery and recreational opportunities. Rugged mountain terrain and lush conifer forests are trademarks of the region. This unbridled scenery has attracted a flood in migration to the region. Flathead County has experienced tremendous growth over the last decade and a wide variety of social and political interests can be found in the valley. Among this diverse population exists citizens who are committed to enhance the socio-economic conditions in the valley. The Flathead Valley is home to the Flathead Forestry Project, an organization whose mission is to develop community-based forestry projects that enhance the health of the local forest resource while providing economic opportunity for local timber workers.

Also originating in the Flathead Valley, is an organization called Flathead Common Ground (FCG), whose interest in forest management, while similar to that of FFP, focused its energy on management issues dealing with sensitive grizzly bear habitat within the Flathead Valley. Although FCG is no longer functioning in the Flathead Valley, the organization made important contributions to the collaboration movement in the west. FCG's objectives were to, "find ways to restore and improve grizzly bear habitat, the protection of old growth forests, and the capitalization on appropriate opportunities to harvest

timber”(Schwennesen 2001). Through countless meetings and discussions of forest management issues, these groups developed a clear vision for forest management plans within the valley. What makes the Paint Emery Stewardship project unique was the presence of these two organizations that contained an existing capacity for participation with the USFS. Whereas the community stakeholders within the Yaak Valley and the Priest Lake Basin organized themselves around the concept of stewardship contracting, the FFP and FCG had been working on viable options to engage the USFS in the implementation of meaningful stewardship forestry activities on the ground. The question then to consider is how well the Paint Emery Project allowed these groups to influence and implement some of their vision for forest management within the parameters of the stewardship pilot project?

A 1997 analysis of the Paint Emery project area conducted by the USFS, showed that, “fire suppression, timber harvesting, insect/disease outbreaks, and other human uses have changed the landscape and negatively affected the health and vitality of the Paint Emery watersheds” (USFS, 2001). The Paint Emery project area is roughly 80,000 acres, however, the stewardship pilot project focuses on several small pieces of this larger landscape analysis. The Paint Emery Stewardship Project consists of 218 acres of timber thinning, 13 acres of weed spraying, 2762 acres of erosion site inventory, 11 miles of initial road maintenance, 33 miles of haul support road maintenance, and 5 miles of road decommissioning (USFS 2001). According to the USFS, the stated goal of the project are as follows:

- Improve water quality
- Improve soil productivity
- Improve wildlife and fish habitat
- Improve visual quality
- Improve the composition, structure, condition, and health of the forest stands

(USFS 2001)

The timber treatments are located in and around three USFS service campgrounds and much of the agency's intent is to improve the visual quality of these recreation areas. The intention of the USFS to perform a prescription that focuses on thinning around campgrounds and improving how the forest looks does not match the desire of interested community members within the Flathead Valley and the project's implementation has disappointed many residents on the Flathead. The story surrounding the community's ability to influence and enter into a meaningful dialogue with the USFS regarding the stewardship project is filled with both success and failure. It begins with the hard work and advocacy of the FFP and FCG.

### **Group Diversity**

The FFP and FCG, have been well documented within the academic research regarding the collaborative movement in the west (Schwennesen 2001). Participants in both groups have emerged have pioneers within the community based forestry. A large part of the success and influence that these groups have been able to achieve can be directly attributed to the diverse composition and representation within their organizational framework.

The Flathead Forestry Project was formed because of genuine dissatisfaction with the public forest management in the Flathead Valley. Two

local independent logging contractors decided something needed to be done about the current state of resource management on the Flathead. These founding members began inviting residents of the community whom they believed would be interested in a new dialogue and could represent a variety of diverse interests within the area. What emerged from those conversations and early group meetings was what is now the Flathead Forestry Project:

We decided that nobody could understand the issues from everyone else's perspective, but that did not matter. We all came together to listen, to bring our personal experience, and work together to realize some common interests (timber industry representative).

The representation early on consisted of members of the timber industry, the USFS, the local business community, a university faculty member, and several stakeholders within the environmental community. Throughout its eight year existence participants have come and go, but at a typical FFP meeting there is adequate representation from diverse interests:

You have loggers, environmentalists, USFS, and people who love this place. FFP is a group of people that are really interested in what goes on here (retired educator).

Likewise in the development of Flathead Common Ground, the recruitment of a variety of interests and perspectives to work on regional forest issues was why these organizations were originally created:

Flathead Common Ground, in a nutshell, was a realization by three major competing interests that they were getting nothing done on their own. The only way we could get anything done was to work together on each other's interests and on the interests of other competing stakeholders (Schildwachter quoted in Schwennesen, 2001).

FGC went on to establish a scientific panel that included a half dozen prominent scientists from the University of Montana. In regular attendance at FCG meetings

were representatives from land management agencies, civic organizations, a broad spectrum of environmental groups, industry representatives, members of the Montanans for Multiple Use, and representatives from Montana's political delegation.

It is important to recognize the civic maturity of both of these collaborative groups from the Flathead. Stewardship forestry and community-based conservation are concepts that these groups have been working through since the early 1990s. The principles of group diversity and open and fair operating procedures were built directly into operations of these groups by their founders. Participants from both groups summarize this point:

It's not easy working with such a wide variety of people – sometimes you don't think anything's going to get accomplished. But if you start out, from day one with the understanding everybody is going to listen to everybody else and try to make some sense of it, you can start to produce results (environmentalist).

There were bigger things to worry about than who is right or who is wrong. We want to see some change occur with in this system, unless we stop fighting with each other, that change just won't happen (industry representative).

### **Communication**

Participants of both the Flathead Forestry Project and Flathead Common Ground have experienced the satisfaction of a process of shared learning among its members. Flathead Forestry Project members comment:

When we sit across the table from each other we reach a lot better decisions than when we are playing games through the press. We are collectively trying to determine the objectives for a particular project which requires an exchange of information. A bi-product of this exchange is the enhancement of the group's knowledge base (timber industry representative).

People at these meetings are honest. Sitting around the table for hours you really get to know each other. And during that time there is a lot of new learning that goes on about each other and the issues at hand (retired educator).

A member of the FCG shares similar sentiments:

Management agencies should integrate the goals of society into management decisions. Projects are better implemented if the community is involved. When you bring an assortment of people together with diverse backgrounds you cover a lot of territory. This is how a community group develops and learns new approaches to solving problems and it's a strategy that the USFS can learn from (timber industry representative).

The intention of both of these groups was to start developing new ideas for public land management. The organizers of these citizens groups understood that in order to develop innovative approaches to land management, the exchange of information between stakeholders is an essential ingredient for success. This is exemplified in the case of the FFP where the acting secretary of the group compiles notes from each meeting, types them up, and distributes them to a variety of people in the northern Rockies that have expressed interest in the community based forestry movement. Community members, academics, agency personnel, and nonprofit organizations are kept informed of the dialogue regarding CBEM that is occurring within the Flathead Valley. This transfer of information allows the FFP to operate under complete transparency and invites interested parties to join conversation regarding forest issues. This form of communication also helps legitimize the FFP as a group that is dedicated and committed to working together to make change in the Flathead Valley. The meeting notes help to unify the voice of FFP to the larger regional community.

The FFP and FCG were organized years before the stewardship contracting authority was granted to the USFS. It was the work of members of the FFP that drafted the original piece of stewardship legislation, of which several of its contracting components were adopted by Congress. Despite the ability of these groups to contain the organizational components of meaningful public participation within CBEM (representation, open procedures, shared learning), it has been the communication component with the USFS that has hindered the ability for these groups to make substantial strides towards implementation.

Commenting on the USFS's ability to communicate with the local community in regards the Paint Emery project, members of FFP state:

I think the USFS is a step behind in dealing with community groups. There is a fear that the amateurs are running the show or there is a concern that involving the public takes too much time. Bringing the public up to speed on the issues is too much work. Informing the public is looked upon as a negative within the USFS. I see it as an investment into building your community, building support for the work on your Forest. The wiser agency folks are saying there really isn't a downside to building an informed community, it can do nothing but help you. And the folks that see it this way, see it as a base for doing community based forestry in the long term, a base for advocacy for the USFS itself (local business women).

I can't figure it out. The USFS service participates with FFP on their own and listens to what the community interests are saying. But the USFS has a slew of forest professionals to deal with forest management. Somewhere there is a disconnect between those people and the people at our meetings (retired educator).

While the communication has been somewhat positive between community groups in the Flathead and some members of the USFS those positive interactions seemed to get swallowed within the bureaucracy. Here is an example.



Flathead Common Ground's mission once again is to contribute landscape size management suggestions to the USFS for implementation on the ground. Specifically, the group has targeted enhancing grizzly bear habitat on the Flathead National Forest. FCG developed a management proposal that addressed its conservation goals for an 80,000 acre tract of land called the Paint Emery Area. This region of forest is nestled in between Hungry Horse reservoir to the west, and for the most part, the Glacier Park/Great Bear/Bob Marshall wilderness complex to the north and east. Its proximity to prime grizzly habitat makes the Paint Emery Area a significant piece of national Forest land for conservation purposes. In 1996 the USFS began working on the Paint Emery Project and with the help of the FCG produced a management plan for the area.

When the Flathead National Forest adopted a management plan some two and half years later, it included many of the recommendations made by FCG. The Paint Emery Stewardship Project is a small project that is a component of the larger management plan for the area. However, the prescription that the USFS developed for the stewardship project did not adhere to the recommendations developed by FCG. Community members do not understand the USFS rationale for adopting the Paint Emery prescription:

I have no idea where that prescription came from. It is a prescription that the FCG did not want to have done. The FCG came up with a proposal that said this is what needs to be done and the USFS came up with something quite different. That is what they decided to go with and there was not a whole lot of community influence in that (local businesswoman).

It is this type of breakdown in the civic dialogue between community interests and the USFS that frustrates residents of the Flathead and constrains the community's ability to engage in a process of meaningful participation:

The USFS has struggled to include the community in the stewardship process. It is hard to ask the agency who have historically done the job one way to turn around and be leaders in a new concept. I think its time for the agency to take their brightest and best people, who are committed to stewardship, and put them on regional teams to work with communities (timber industry representative).

The USFS is now in a position where they have to apologize to the community because they did not get the prescription right. The community did not care for the treatment on the campground unit. The on the ground prescription is not a reflection of what the community was interested in (local businesswoman).

The opportunity exists within the parameters of the stewardship pilot program for community groups to influence outcomes on the ground. But that result takes communication between local interests and land managers. In the case of the Paint Emery project, the disconnect between the USFS and the local interests created a situation where the end result of the stewardship project was not the desired outcome of the community. While certainly the USFS bears a portion of this responsibility, the FFP's approach to influencing the project may have contributed to its poor outcome.

### **Power**

The FFP has been trying to implement various contracting mechanisms that promote forest stewardship for nearly seven years, one of which is the delivered log concept that provides merchantable timber from a timber treatment as a bi-product of a greater vision of stewardship forestry The Paint Emery

Stewardship project was seen as an opportunity to test the delivered log concept, along with several other new mechanisms as outlined in the legislation. It became the priority of the FFP to be heavily involved in contracting component of the project. The question then was if the USFS was willing to comply:

We know that the USFS is having a hard time letting go of some control with the stewardship contracts. We were really advocating for the use of the delivered log concept and designation by description. The local contracting community is talented and can implement the thinning if they are giving the opportunity to prescribe the cut (timber industry representative).

We would really like the agency to be responsive to the creativity and local ambition of local collaborative. They need to embrace us or bring in a group of people with a different attitude (timber industry representative).

The USFS acknowledged that the FFP was, in fact, able to influence the writing of the contract:

The FFP was really involved in contract development for Paint Emery – they help us figure out how much flexibility the contractor could have in the prescription, how the monitoring was going to take place, and the delivered log concept was going to work (USFS representative).

FFP was able to successfully participate with the agency and have their contracting recommendations implemented into the project. However, in hindsight, based on the outcome of the project, FFP realized they may have made a mistake by their failure to focus on the prescription rather than mainly on the contract:

There is a significant amount of community disappointment with the project. The USFS realizes that they took more trees than they should have. Part of the problem was that the people who developed the prescription did not convey that design adequately to those who were going to carry them out. Internally I think various specialists in the

recreation department and within sivilculture had a different understanding of what was trying to be accomplished. We were able to test various contracting mechanisms, we were successful there. What happened on the ground is not a success. We learned some things that should not be done again. The community did not get involved in the prescription and there will be reluctance for the community to get involved in future projects if we do not have much to say about the prescription (local businesswomen).

While the FFP had the power and influence to affect the contract, what occurred on the ground is a more accurate indication of the success of the project:

We were involved in the project and were able to test a piece of it. But the success of the project as a whole ends up influencing people's perception of stewardship contracting. The trees will grow back but for those people who had used the campground before, the quality of their experience has been disturbed. One women was moved to write a poem to the USFS to describe how sad she was feeling (local businesswomen).



The FFP and FCG had varying degrees of success in the participation process with the USFS in regards to the Paint Emery Stewardship Project. Both groups possess the key ingredients to engage in meaningful participation with the agency, however based on the outcome of the project, their influence regarding implementation was unsuccessful. FCG was able to have an impact on the larger landscape assessment of the Paint Emery Area by way of management recommendations. However these recommendations were absent from the prescription that was carried out within the stewardship contract. Similarly the FFP had success engaging in a dialogue with the USFS regarding the various contracting mechanisms to be tested. The success in this component of the project is tainted by the poor quality of the work that was executed on the ground.

The designation by prescription piece of the contract was never fully realized and decisions about cutting regimes were made by the USFS rather than the contractor:

The stewardship loggers want out of the contract because they are uncomfortable with the prescription and are now say we are not going to do this anymore. They told me if they were in this same situation, they were not going to do the work (local businesswomen).

While some components of meaningful participation within the CBEM framework were realized, overall the voice of the community and the desired outcome of the stewardship project failed to be implemented.

By examining the Paint Emery Project with the evaluation criteria, it becomes clear that the failure of community members and the USFS to effectively communicate about the project prescription, lead to the failed fulfillment of meaningful public participation.

| Topic           | Criteria 1        | Criteria 2              |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Group Diversity | Representation ++ | Fair/Open Procedures ++ |
| Communication   | Shared Learning + | Civic Dialogue 0        |
| Power           | Influence -       | Impact on the Ground -- |

## **Chapter 7 - Discussion**

Each of the three cases examined offers unique insight as to the effect that the stewardship contracting pilot program has had on community stakeholders and their ability to engage the USFS in meaningful participation regarding natural resource management. The criteria used to evaluate participation are by no means the only indicators of a meaningful participation process, but they serve as a barometer for the measurement of participation in each region. By examining the events that have unfolded within each case inside the parameters of the evaluation model, a general assessment of meaningful participation can be formulated.



Creating a process that includes a broad perspective of opinions that can be expressed within a setting that is respectful, fair, and openly honest is a primary ingredient for successful participation within the framework of CBEM. By assembling a diverse group of stakeholders, operating in an open and fair process, the Priest River Stewardship Committee was able to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the USFS and local communities about their goals for the project - forest restoration and the creation of local jobs. The same can be said for the Flathead Forestry Project and Flathead Common Ground and the ability of these organizations to acquire broad perspectives -representation in each of these groups was intentionally comprised of diverse interests. In both the Paint Emery and Priest Lake stewardship projects all interested parties were welcomed to participate as community stakeholders. In the Priest Lake case, the perspective of the environmental community was difficult to ascertain but an effort was made

to include this important community voice and the inclusion of this perspective enhanced the group's validity. This was not the case in the Yaak valley.

The way in which the Yaak steering committee was formed contradicts the notion of diverse group relationship within the framework of CBEM. The majority of the committee and the Yaak community were unwilling to cooperatively work with stakeholders whose perception in the community is that of the extreme political left. The conscious exclusion of three members of the YVFC and the procedure in which the voting of the stewardship committee took place was not a fair process. While the excluded members of the YVFC were able to attend field meetings and discuss issues with the stewardship committee, these people were still considered outside participants to the project by the greater Yaak community and the stewardship committee.

However, this failure of the Yaak Stewardship Committee to enter the participation process with a broad representation of interests did not limit their ability to communicate effectively with the USFS and the community at large. While the official recognition of certain members of the YVFC on the stewardship committee was absent, their continued presence motivated the committee to remain engaged in the project and foster a dialogue with the agency. Part of the communication success surrounding the Yaak project can also be attributed to agency personnel. A representative from the USFS who worked closely with the Yaak community gives insight on the role the agency played in process surrounding the project:

If people are interested, the USFS is obligated to enter into a process of collaboration. Because of the diversity of the Yaak, it's somewhat difficult

to get consensus – people have different views. The group has somewhat gotten away from the polarization and the level of trust is getting better, we're gaining trust and building good relationships. We are trying to be responsive to the community suggestions and we are responsive to the extent to which the proposal agrees with the agencies policies... We are now acting as the catalyst behind the projects, we try to motivate people to meet and educate people by overseeing the process and meetings initiated by the Yaak community (USFS representative).

The willingness to cooperate with the Yaak community can be attributed to the mandates within the stewardship legislation, but successful communication is also indicative of the individual agency personal within each case. Community stakeholders in the Yaak felt that the USFS was doing a commendable job in their efforts to include local interests in the development of the project. While the stewardship committee had alienated members of the YVFC, the USFS was able to engage and listen to these citizens during the site visits and take into account their perspectives on the project. The agency could have declared that since these people were not part of the official stewardship committee that their opinions were not to be considered in the design of the project. This willingness to cooperate with all interested community stakeholders helped to unite a very divisive community and kept the project moving forward.

The perception of the agency within the Priest Lake Basin stewardship project was similar. Respondents from the PRSC felt that effective communication surrounding the project was indicative of local USFS personnel's desire to work with community members. Respondents from the Priest Lake case acknowledged that their ability to work together and learn from one another enhanced their ability to communicate with the USFS. However these same respondents noted that that the degree to which they can achieve success largely



depended on the USFS's ability to be receptive to ideas put forth by the community. By in large the PRSC was satisfied at the local level with the participation and communication displayed by the Priest Lake Ranger District in the process surrounding stewardship contracting. While the PRSC were discouraged that they could not actually write the contract, which would have been a violation of federal law, they felt the USFS was able to move through the process and meet the needs presented by community interests.

However, in the Paint Emery Case, it was a breakdown in communication between community interests and the intention of the USFS that lead to a disappointing project outcome. The FFP has effectively communicated its ideas on forest management with the greater Flathead community for nearly ten years. Through continuous meetings that discuss relevant community issues and the dissemination of these meeting notes throughout the region, FFP has done an excellent job fostering effective communication. FCG, while in existence, worked diligently to inform the USFS and interested community and regional stakeholders as to their forest management agenda.

FFP was successful in communicating their desire for certain contractual mechanisms to be included within the Paint Emery project. However, FCG's prescription was not part of the USFS's project implementation. Thus the project as a whole, from the perspective of the FFP, remaining members of FCG, and the community at large, was perceived as unsuccessful. The failure of the agency to respond to the desired prescription of the Flathead Valley community demonstrates a clear lack of effective communication. Respondents from the

Flathead community concur and felt it was the responsibility of the agency to engage local people in the decision making process regarding stewardship projects. However a representative from the agency felt there wasn't a large interest from the community surrounding the project which may reflect why the prescription came from the USFS:

The FFP was interested in specific parts of the contracting like implementing flexibility into the prescriptions and how the monitoring was going to occur. But mostly the community hasn't been too involved. There were several newspaper articles and a few tours but other than FFP people, these were not well attended. Even the cross section for multiparty monitoring dwindled because right now there is nothing to monitor (USFS representative).

It appears that a combination of the failure of the USFS to engage local people and the communities' failure get their message across to the appropriate agency personnel, lead to a breakdown in the dialogue surrounding the project. Perhaps if there was a greater commitment to the collaborative process from the USFS within the Flathead Valley, the voice of the community would have been reflected in the outcome of the Paint Emery project. The contractors who were awarded the project seemed to have little to say as to the nature of the prescription, which raises questions about the "designation by prescription" component of the legislation and if the contracting community truly had discretion over the on the ground forest treatment. This evidence also questions the actual power that community participants have over the outcomes of these projects.

If the USFS is not going to consider the perspective of the community within the rubric of stewardship contracting and incorporate a community's goals to the fullest extent possible, then communities will have not gained the necessary

power to effectively participate in the decision making process. This was the case in Paint Emery where the Flathead community influenced certain components of the process but their affect on the outcome was limited. It was the USFS who essentially “dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s”. Whereas in the Yaak Valley and in the Priest Lake Basin, the community participants felt as if they had influence over the project design and to a certain extent, they were satisfied with the design of the contract. The PRSC felt that in order to ensure their power and control over the process they needed to form a nonprofit and bid on the work. Had they not been awarded the contract, the situation would have been different and the group would have felt an incredible loss of power. The agency in this case acted appropriately and awarded the community group the contract. In both cases, the groups were satisfied with the agency’s ability to include them into the process surrounding stewardship contracting, which by itself, represents a major change in how effectively a community can participate in the management of natural resources on public lands.

Meaningful public participation within the process of stewardship contracting is certainly not a black or white issue. In each of the three cases there are positive and negative aspects of a process that engages citizens in meaningful participation. However, on a whole, the pilot program does begin to address the concept of community based ecosystem management and some of the major tenants of meaningful public participation. The goal now for the agency is to learn from the first round of projects and improve upon their ability to include local communities in the participation process surrounding stewardship projects.

The next chapter identifies some hurdles and roadblocks that the USFS will have to negotiate in order to ensure meaningful public participation within future stewardship projects.

## **Chapter 8 – Reflections, Further Study and Closing**

Whatever the original intent of the legislation was I don't know. But there is something that has been triggered at the local level as a result of stewardship contract. Dialogue and change is occurring (environmentalist).

The change that has taken place as a result of stewardship contracting has manifested itself differently in each of the three communities. However within each case, on some level, communities have been able to engage the USFS in a process of meaningful public participation with the design and implementation of stewardship project proposals and contracts. The influence that local people have had over USFS management decisions has improved, in some cases significantly, as a result of their involvement in stewardship projects. By no means are these three cases model examples of meaningful public participation in natural resource management decision making, but the events that have unfolded in each of these places demonstrates hope and promise for the future of CBEM in USFS management policy and decision making.

The purpose of the pilot program was to test a new set of tools for the management of public lands; from the introduction of new contracting mechanisms to the inclusion of local people in the management process, stewardship contracting is primarily about creating positive change for rural communities and the enhancement of our public forests. An evaluation of these projects is significant for improving the overall quality of the stewardship contracting program and the processes associated with the implementation of projects. By examining the USFS's ability to engage communities in a process of

meaningful public participation within three projects in the northern Rocky Mountains, some general recommendations can be made for improving the civic dialogue between the agency and local community members which would enhance the pilot program as a whole.

### **Roadblocks and Hurdles for Meaningful Community Participation**

#### **1) Project Selection**

In all three cases the selection of the project site was essentially a decision that was made by the USFS. The community stakeholders in the Yaak Valley had the ability to choose a project location, but it was essentially a small piece of a larger project that the USFS was intending to work on. The predetermined location of stewardship projects largely reflected the agencies desire to implement the projects as quickly as possible. By choosing locations in which Environmental Impact Statements or Environmental Assessments were complete, the agency felt stewardship projects could then quickly reach the contracting phase. Returning to the definition of meaningful participation presented earlier in this paper, the community must be involved in a project's inception for this type of participation and sense of influence to occur. The Yaak community agreed that it was appropriate, for the sake of time, to use a project site in which the NEPA analysis was completed. However in that case, the agency's analysis was appealed by the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and the project was subsequently delayed a year and a half. This is evidence that if a project is not created and designed by a diverse community group, where the voice of the environmental

community is addressed and respected, the likelihood of an appeal is increased.

This idea ties into my next point of criticism.

## **2) Disengaging the Local Environmental Community**

In the three cases I have examined, the projects themselves focused on sites in which the ecological component of the project was relatively non-controversial. The endorsement of the environmental community was easier to obtain in these instances. However, if the agency continues to produce poor quality work on projects that seem to have little ecological significance, or the agency wants to perform a stewardship project in an area where ecological concerns are present, the USFS will be less likely to have the support of environmental interests. The loss of support of environmental interests would be detrimental for several reasons.

First, without input from environmental interests meaningful, multi-party participation is less likely. The premise behind meaningful public participation is to empower a diverse group of people to focus on a handful of common ideas and see those ideas implemented on the ground. If the voice of the local environmental community is absent from the dialogue, you then have a conversation about resource management between the agency and a narrow constituency of people who are concerned about increasing jobs or reducing the risk of wild fire in the urban wildland interface. The point is that in the long run a narrow conversation will have a negative impact on the health of the local community and landscape and limit meaningful participation from the

environmental community. Further public polarization and conflict are likely results if the USFS can not engage environmental concerns.

Secondly, if stewardship contracting is going to focus on forest restoration there needs to be an environmental ethic present within the civic conversation regarding these projects. That ethic can and should be determined by local environmental concerns, that address forest health issues and are in compliance with national environmental law. The environmental ethic that is established for a particular project in a particular place becomes the barometer by which to measure all activities that are addressed within the scope of the proposed work. This does not ensure community-based projects immunity from appeals from outside interests, but it provides an ethical basis for the project in terms of the ecological impacts the project will incur. If the agency continues to produce poor results on the ground, as in the Paint Emery project, or moves towards project areas in which it is very difficult for local environmental interests to sign off, tension between community members, the USFS, and environmental concerns is likely to erupt. Again this type of polarized situation has significant bearing on a communities ability participate with the agency.

The Yaak community experienced this scenario to a certain extent during the development of their stewardship project. The majority of the community wanted to see an increase of jobs within the valley. Because of its environmental concerns, the Yaak Valley Forest Council was seen as an impediment to this goal and two of the three volunteer council members from the YVFC were voted off the stewardship committee. For the sake of the community, the YFVC was able



to continue to participate in the stewardship process, and influence the project from the periphery. However, if there were no way to influence the project the YVFC would have attempted to pull the plug. If stewardship contracting becomes simply a means to enhance local economies, dressed in a rhetoric of forest restoration, the environmental community will have a difficult time remaining on the sidelines. At some point the agency must be clear about the program's intentions which should focus on increasing meaningful public participation in the management process while at the same time addressing the existing forest health issues.

### **3) The Institutional Agency**

Much of the criticism shared by community members regarding participation within the framework of stewardship contracting stems from the USFS's inability to effectively engage interested stakeholders. If collaboration with local communities within the parameters of the pilot program is a priority for the USFS, then it is up to the agency to develop the internal capacity to incorporate communities in a process of meaningful participation.

Land management agencies, in this case the USFS, will ultimately have the final say regarding management decisions. The extent to which the voice of the community is included in these decisions largely depends on the role the agency plays in facilitating a discussion between community interests and agency objectives. The USFS must make a concerted effort to change internally for this process to successfully occur. Anne Moote and Hannah Cortner write:

In order for citizens to participate effectively in ecosystem management, government processes must include forums where public deliberation can

occur. This will require a major restructuring of information and how it is communicated. Agency planning and decision-making processes must be capable of accommodating new forms of knowledge and multiple sources of information, balancing both expert and lay input. Effective management will involve citizens and stakeholder groups at the earliest possible stages and throughout the planning process, including problem definition, data gathering and analysis, and monitoring. Agency procedures, and likely also regulations, will have to be adjusted to include citizens in determining management goals and procedures (Moote and Cortner, 1997, pg. 104).

There are a variety of reasons why the USFS can not currently make these necessary changes to develop a process for meaningful public participation within the framework of CBEM. From budgetary constraints, to the lack of qualified personnel, to an overworked staff, or the lack of CBEM as a priority for the USFS, the agency faces many challenges that they must address as an organization if change is going to occur.

The current paradigm for meaningful participation places much of the burden on communities themselves to engage the USFS. Strong community leadership was present in each of the case studies. This leadership was critical in keeping the dialogue and the communication with the USFS from breaking down. The USFS must actively seek opportunities to engage community interests when developing management plans and become the leading advocate for community participation. This advocacy does not have to take place for every decision or action the USFS seeks to implement, but in those instances in which local people are certain to have concerns over management decisions, the agency must be proactive in the inclusion of community interests. Agency leadership is the essential component of this type of paradigm shift.

The stewardship contracting legislation was developed in response to the needs of local people and to address forest health issues. The pilot program, while in no way perfect, appears to be a first step towards institutionalizing community based ecosystem management as forest policy. An examination of three stewardship projects in the northern Rockies demonstrates that this program has the potential to engage local communities in a process of meaningful participation regarding land management decisions. There are a myriad of factors that will continually contribute to the successful implementation of community-based management projects; the timber economy, the political climate, the USFS budget, catastrophic wildfire, and the communities themselves play significant roles in the USFS's ability to administer CBEM programs. However, if CBEM is addressed as a priority of the USFS, and if the political will is present to remain committed to the enhancement of local communities and forest restoration, the stewardship contracting program could have profound impacts on the health of our public lands and will benefit the communities of people whose livelihoods and culture are connected to the well-being of our National Forest system.

### **Further Study**

Successfully implementing the stewardship contracting pilot program in terms of its emphasis on meaningful community participation is challenging. There are several components of the process surrounding the pilot programs that are in need of further research. The greater understanding communities and the USFS can obtain regarding an effective public participation process, the more

likely proactive change can be made within future projects to enhance the community based ecosystem management model.

**#1 – Qualitative research regarding the participation of the contracting community would greatly enhance the outcomes of future projects. These are the people who are performing the work on the ground. An assessment of their experiences implementing prescriptions is a vital component for evaluating pivotal pieces of the legislation, i.e. designation by description, best value contracting and the exchange of goods for services. Also contracts have been awarded in a bundled fashion which obligates contractors to perform the vegetative treatments and the service components of the projects, which requires a variety of skills, or the ability to sub-contract the work. It is then important from the perspective of the contracting community to assess the feasibility of this new contract structure. Does the local contracting community have the capacity to handle a rigorous contracting and implementation process?**

**#2 – Qualitative research of USFS personnel would also greatly enhance the outcomes of future projects. Ultimately the agency is responsible for public land management. The CBEM model shifts the power structure as to share the decision-making ability with invested local communities. It is important to assess the capacity of the organization to allow for this shift to occur. New sets of skills may need to be provided to agency personnel for working with communities. USFS personnel may not want to work with local people because of a variety of**

reasons. Is the USFS ready to relinquish power to local people? What is the sentiment from the regional offices regarding community involvement in stewardship contracting? This information is very critical to ascertain if CBEM management is going to be incorporated as a management strategy within the stewardship contracting program.

**#3** – Many of the values within the stewardship legislation resonate with the environmental community. Forest restoration and the employment of local people within well-defined, needed treatment units, are principles that the environmental perspective values tremendously. However, given the fact that stewardship contracting is being introduced by the USFS, an organization that has not earned the trust of many in the public lands conservation movement, its acceptance by this important constituency is doubtful. Stewardship contracting has the potential to bridge the gap between resources managers, local communities, and the environmental community.

There will always be people that oppose any management activity on public lands. But there is a large contingent within the environmental community that believe forest restoration and local employment are compatible with the protection and enhancement of forest ecosystems. A better understanding of this perspective can begin to mesh conservation values within the concept of stewardship contracting. Qualitative research can once again become a useful tool in understanding how the perspective of national, regional, and local environmentalists can engage communities of place. There is common ground

regarding CBEM between national environmental interests and rural communities. With time and energy this common ground could turn into meaningful policy implications to address the myriad of needs within our National Forest System.

#### **#4 – The Formation of a 501c3**

The Priest Lake Stewardship Committee was able to achieve a high level of success in project implementation. A large part of this success was in the ability to be awarded the contract because of their 501c3 status. Further research exploring the idea that in order to truly be effective as a community group in working with the Forest Service, the community group must form a non-profit to become a legitimate player. By examining other cases in which community members have organized into a non-profit to deal specifically with certain issues surrounding forest management, it would shed some light on the effectiveness of this process.

These are but a few of the question marks surrounding the stewardship program that additional research would help to answer. However, if this program is going to move forward and be given permanent authorization, these questions and concerns must be addressed.

#### **Closing**

There is great potential for stewardship contracting to begin to embrace many of the values developed within the concept of CBEM. In order for this to occur, there must be a commitment to this philosophy of land management by the

USFS. In addition, there must be the political will in Washington D.C. to continue to recognize the important contributions local communities can have for forest management. However, given the current Bush administration propensity to support extraction over restoration, its definition of “local control” and “states rights”, and the enormous budgetary commitment that has been made to fighting fires in the West, the stewardship contracting pilot program seems destined to remain under funded and used as a tool for increased timber harvest. Furthermore, the reliance on the goods for service provision within the current stewardship model is recipe for failure – forest restoration can not rely always on the removal of timber to be an effective tool for enhancing forest ecosystems. Appropriated dollars are needed to support forest restoration.

There are communities throughout the west that have the intention and capacity to enhance the public land management system. Each of the three cases within this research provided evidence of this. How these communities are engaged in future decision making surrounding the management of our public forests remains to be seen. History has proven that the reliance on the USFS as the sole managers of our national forests is problematic. Incorporating the voice of the people that are connected to the forest landscape through culture, economics, and place would invigorate the current system of forest management that is need of change. This potential exists within communities throughout the nation. Through hard work, a dedication to forest restoration, and a commitment to local communities, the USFS, through the stewardship contracting program,

can begin to change the way in which public forests are managed. Whether or not this potential will be realized is unclear.



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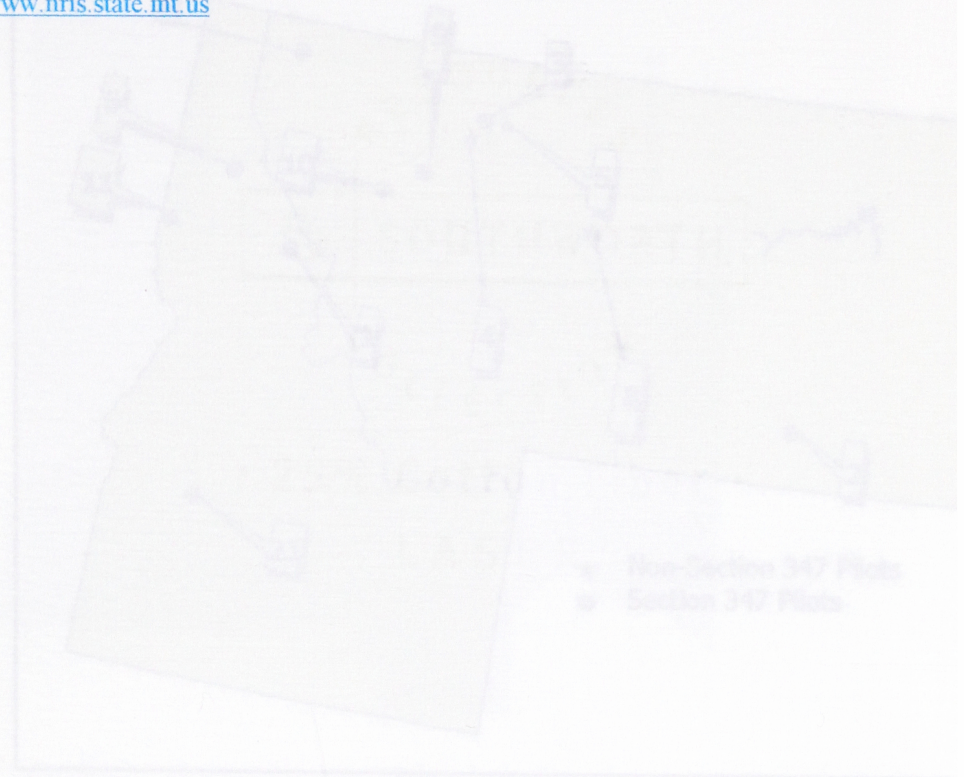
Maps obtained from the following places:

[www.northernidaho.org](http://www.northernidaho.org)

[www.redlodgeworkshop.org](http://www.redlodgeworkshop.org)

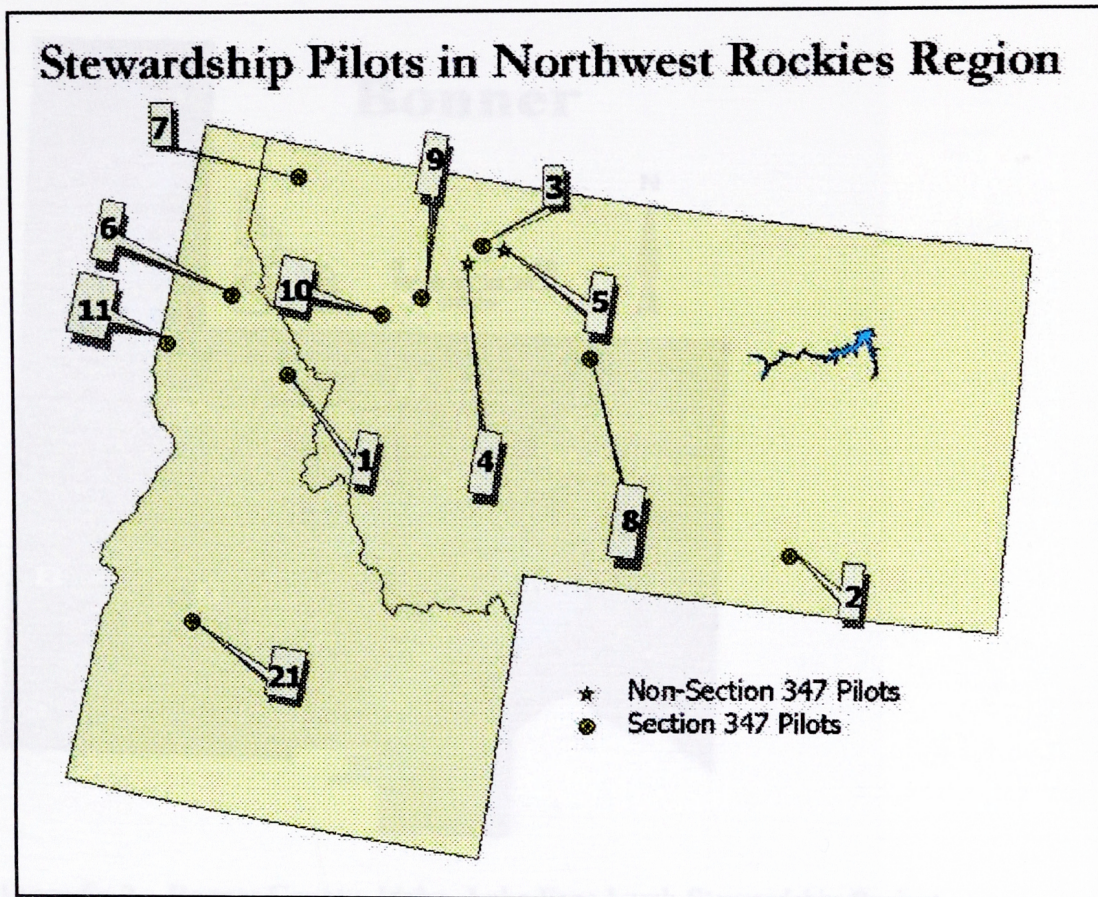
[www.pinchot.org/pic](http://www.pinchot.org/pic)

[www.nris.state.mt.us](http://www.nris.state.mt.us)



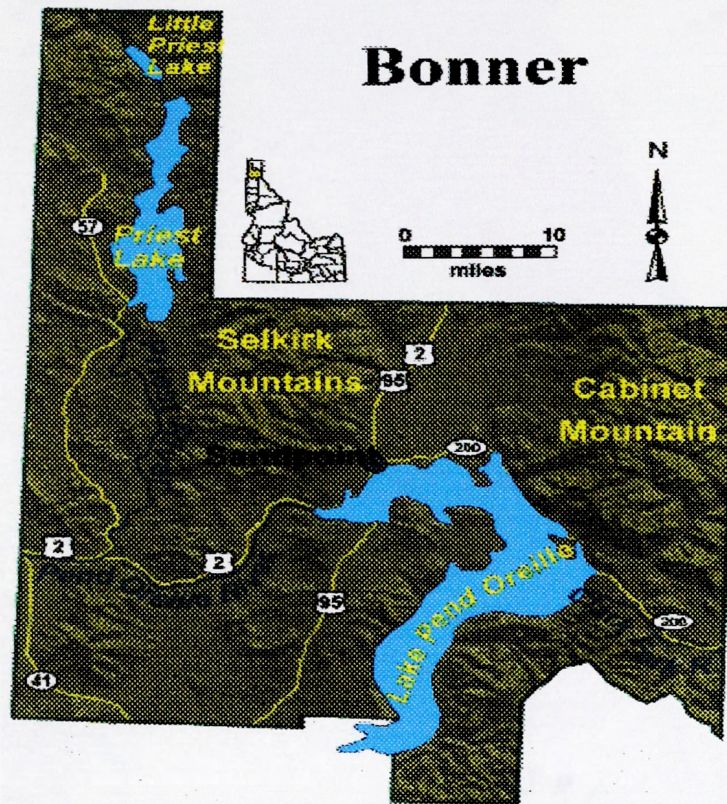
Appendix 1 - Stewardship Projects - Northern Region





Appendix 1 – Stewardship Projects - Northern Region





Appendix 2 – Bonner County, Idaho- Lake Face Lamb Stewardship Project



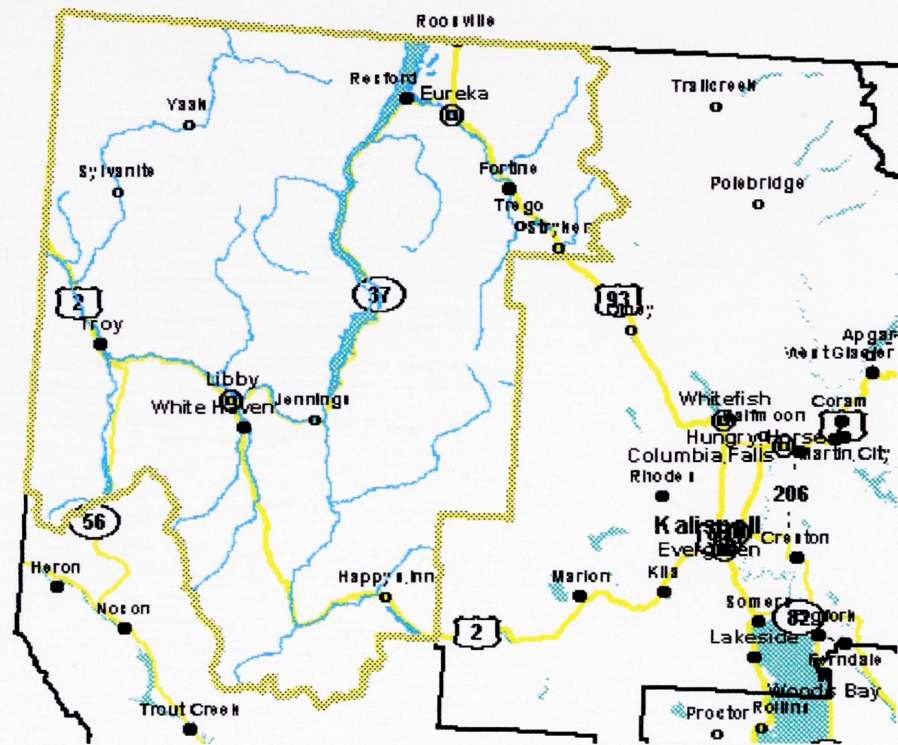
Appendix 3 – Flathead County, Paint Emory Stewardship Project





Appendix 3 – Flathead County, Paint Emery Stewardship Project





Appendix 4 – Yaak Valley and surrounding area.